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On the cover: Roland Joffé's 'The Killing Fields Photo: David Appleby.

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## NTHEPCTURE



'Full leisurely we glide . . .' Dream Child on location near Oxford.

## Dream Child

All in the golden afternoon
Full leisurely we glide;
For both our oars, with
little skill,
By little arms are plied;
While Gavin signals from
the bank
Our wanderings to guide.

As it happens, I arrived in Oxford a few days late for the filming of that 'golden afternoon', still the single most celebrated and haunting anecdote of English literary history. It had inaugurated the shoot of Dream Child, a new Thorn EMI production destined for theatrical release at Easter 1985. Gavin Millar is directing from an original screenplay by Dennis Potter, and the film stars Coral Browne as the elderly Alice Hargreaves (née Liddell), Ian Holm as the Reverend Charles Dodgson (mort Carroll) and twelve-yearold Amelia Shankley as both Alice Hargreaves' younger self and the surnameless 'dream child' into which Carroll transmuted her.

As it also happens, the project is being closely monitored by the Lewis Carroll Society, who will doubtless be none too delighted to learn of the liberties taken by both writer and director in the reconstruction of what is, after all, an exhaustively documented life. For the sequence of the trip down the river, Millar informed me, it was decided that the black topcoat worn by Dodgson did not cut a summery enough appearance and it was soon exchanged for a fawn one (not a very radical departure from historical accuracy, but those Carrollites are nothing if not purist). More shockingly, Potter's script called for an extra passenger on the boat: Alice's mother (played by Jane Asher).

But then, it appears altogether unlikely that Dream Child is going to emerge as yet another complacently nostalgic evocation of England's belle epoque. What, in fact, is the subject-matter (or object-matter, as perhaps one should say) of the film? If one asks Potter, the answer is 'anxiety'; ask Millar, and it's 'illusions of love'; and ask, as Millar once did, a ribald member of the crew, and it's 'Did he or didn't he?' (By which he meant to refer, not to the preposterous 'controversy', recently issued from the United States, as to whether Dodgson actually wrote the Alice books, but to his extra-literary relationship with his under-age Muse.)

Its 'present tense' is the 1930s, when a widowed Mrs Hargreaves is invited to attend a ceremony in New York in honour of the centenary of Dodgson's birth (a historical fact). On board the liner carrying her across the Atlantic, she is assailed first by memories of their friendship, then by what might be described as a belated rage to understand not only a proclivity on his part which she is now obliged to condemn as perverse but also her own childishly heedless cruelty towards a man whose heart she trifled with as though it were a pin-cushion. And intermingled with these memories are dreams, or rather nightmares, out of Wonderland and Looking-Glass (whose characters will be incarnated by life-size puppets designed by Jim Henson).

Speaking for myself, as someone who has neither read the script nor viewed any rushes, I should guess that *Dream Child* is really about the mysterious process by which Dodgson's repressed sexuality—a sexuality (and can anyone doubt its existence?) whose impulses, if acted upon, would have led to the most calamitous personal disgrace—was sublimated into two uniquely 'sexless', unphysical and unsuggestive, masterpieces of children's literature.

Oxford seemed to be taking the infestation in its eccentric stride. During one crowd scene, in Oriel Square, a curiously stiff-jointed gentleman delayed a shot for several minutes by trotting unflappably beside the extras in their pearl-grey toppers and morning coats, perched atop museum-piece unicycles and Dickensian dray carts, as though he himself were so locked into the nineteenth century that nothing struck him as amiss. Conversely. an American guide, shepherding a party of tourists around the city, seamlessly integrated the whole freakish spectacle into the mechanical rat-a-tat of her spiel. '... And here you see the filming of Dream Child, with Ian Holm as Lewis Carroll. Now I'm sure you all remember him from Chariots of Fire and Greystoke . . and off to the next monument.

Later, I chatted with Amelia Shankley, who is the daughter of Jeff Shankley (currently Greaseball in the stage musical *Starlight Express*) and already a poised performer in her own right. According to Amelia: a number of boys actually auditioned to play Alice; she has enjoyed film-

making so far, except for one deeply embarrassing moment when a perfect take was spoiled by her tummy rumbling ('I am always hungry'); her idol is Michael Jackson but, as an actress, she admires Elizabeth Taylor; and her role is of a little girl who, realising that she is loved by a middle-aged man, can afford to treat him as unfeelingly as she pleases. (Poor Ian Holm! after his magnificent performance on television as J. M. Barrie, here he is again at the mercy of a dazzling and ruthless child.)

Looking, in her Victorian finery, like a mischievous fox cub in a Beatrix Potter ballet and followed by her entourage (one tutor, one chaperone), she then wandered off across the lawn of Wadham in the direction, no doubt at all in my mind, of fame and fortune. Twinkle, twinkle, little star...

GILBERT ADAIR

## Bulgaria

## Sophisticated film-making from the Balkans

Until such time as translators are properly paid for their efforts and the British public rediscovers (which won't happen) the joy of reading, whole sections of the world are best available to the general public via the cinema. It is an extraordinary privilege, in a way, to be a film critic, simply in terms of the range and diversity of cultures one comes across from one year to the next. The ideology of the film critic is of necessity humanist and international (even

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if the institutional study of cinema, in universities and polytechnics, increasingly isn't).

Such thoughts were prompted by a little season of films from Bulgaria shown recently at the National Film Theatre. The Bulgarian state has recently celebrated its 1300th anniversary, the last forty years of which have been under communist rule. Despite its increased accessibility to Western visitors, we know very little about the country; although maybe more than we know about Albania. But this is countered, in turn, by the fact that what we do know, or think we know tends to be lurid: a mishmash of sensational Balkan stories involving spies, popes, conspiracies and poisoned umbrellas.

They may or may not be true, these stories, and if true, tragic or farcical in the proportion one wants to fasten on them. The immediate corrective provided by the films on offer, however, was a restoration of human normality. There is traffic on the roads, not all of it, one was pleased to see, in the form of heavy duty construction lorries. The women in the cities are attractive and wellgroomed. There is the usual variety of classes. Houses and apartments (give or take the little problem of living space) are much the same as houses and apartments all over the world. The standard Western consumer durables-record-players, hairdryers—are taken for granted.

No very great revelations here; but a pleasing (because unostentatious) confirmation of certain textures and continuities allowing life to be lived at a level of civility and comfort. One notices from the section of modern films how much readier people are in the East than they are here to organise their leisure time sensibly. No one in the West (at least of my acquaintance) gives parties like Eastern Europeans. I don't mean highly structured affairs; on the contrary, just a relaxed gathering of friends over a weekend in order to barbecue a pig and drink a bit of wine and indulge in some fishing and guitar playing. The scene showing one such gathering in Vibration (director Todor Styanov) had a beautiful Arcadian quality to it (though to put it like this risks making it sound artificial). Why is it, one wonders, that in the West only teenagers are allowed to be sociable?

Vibration tells the story of a crisis at a nuclear electricity-generating plant. The film was advertised, of course, as an Eastern bloc version of *The China Syndrome*. The main difference between the two movies is that whereas the American film has the fault at the plant uncovered by a pair

of investigative journalists who have to break down the taciturn secretiveness of the employees, in *Vibration* it is one of the employees—a high-powered engineer and research scientist—who, against obdurate opposition, conducts the investigation, and in the midst of great drama finally puts matters right.

Technical investigation merges seamlessly into an investigation of human relationships—the dialectics and evasions of power and responsibility. The acting was exceptionally impressive in its restrained naturalism, particularly that of the leading player, Nikolai Sotirov, whose handsome, saturnine presence radiated a sort of ethical sanity and calm. Equally nuanced, and accurate, were the gestures of the prevaricating bureaucrats, always believable, never descending to caricature, always powerful and dangerous.

This wasn't to my mind quite so true of the characters in Central Hotel, billed as the major film of the season. Taken from a novel by Georgi Konstantinov, a Bulgarian Maupassant of the interwar years, it retains rather too clearly for filmic comfort its allegiance to literary naturalism. Its studious 'realism' is artificial. A girl from a poor family, seduced and abandoned, is taken on as a chambermaid at a provincial hotel, the conditions of her employment being that she services from time to time with her body the hotel clientele-a passing trade of merchants, farmers and commercial travellers (as well as the lecherous landlord). Pretty, ardent and tender, she longs for a liberation that never arrives. Her saga of restless waiting takes place against a background of growing political unrest. Bulgaria in the 30s went fascist-though not so alarmingly as in neighbouring Hungary and Rumania. Life, at any event, seems to go on fairly gently in this provincial backwater, despite changes. There are parties and get-togethers and bicycle races, nicely filmed. In the middle of a convivial gathering, news arrives that the world strong man championship has been won by a Bulgarian. With one accord the assembled company break into a resounding chorus of 'Bulgaria, mother of strong men', strip off their shirts and start wrestling each other. The scene is rather wild and exaggerated. But the film balances gaiety with sombreness. If it is not quite the masterpiece it thinks it is, it struck me, nevertheless, as confident and ambitious.

History was again essayed, in the context of peasant life, in Ivan Andonov's White Magic. Stylistically speaking, it was the most lithe and extravagant of the films on display: a dancing, whirling kaleidoscope of colour and images in the manner of Wajda's *The Wedding* or Paradjanov's *Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors* or—finally, why not?—any of the 60s movies of Jancsò.

White Magic shared with Nikola Korabov's Destiny, the other main 'peasant' film on offer, a rather ferocious attitude towards civil authority, especially towards religion and the Church. The Church in Bulgaria has had a long and distinguished history (one of the first tasks of the early Tsars Simeon and Boris in the eighth century having been to set up an independent Exarchate, separate from Rome and Byzantium). Not, however, for Andonov and Korabov the civilised Russian' pieties of Andrei Roublev or The Colour of Pomegranates. At least, not yet-maybe that time will come. Meanwhile Andonov placed in the comic-idyllic mode what Korabov looked at more darkly and soberly: a world of spooks and spirits and superstitions, of narrow passions and grim peasant revenges. The films seemed to delight in their paganism and cruelty; but they were saved from frivolity by the power of their realistic detail and the energy of their formal construction.

Which leaves, finally, a 'junior' film, engagingly enough entitled Yo Ho Ho. I liked this film very much. An actor lies in hospital dying of an unspecified disease; a little boy recovering from a broken arm strolls into his room to recover a toy parachute. A friendship is struck up-rather spiky and difficult, for the dying man is both bitter and intelligent. He spins the boy a pirate yarn, which the film then fitfully illustrates, with several interruptions, bringing us back to the hospital. It must have been difficult to marry these two very different forms of narrative, the 'pirate' and the hospital; and the



White Magic.

final result isn't without hesitations and longueurs. Did the film appeal to children in Bulgaria, as plainly it was meant to? For me, the interest was adult. The film captured the most serious moments in anyone's life when death threatens. Nothing at all can be said. Everything balances on gesture and reticence. An atmosphere of unspoken passion. The movie had a directness of sentiment that is increasingly shied away from in Western art.

MARK LE FANU

## Ideology

Party Resolution on Soviet cinema

In early May this year, Pravda published the text of a major policy document concerning the strategic future of Soviet cinema. The document was a Resolution by the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) and the USSR Council of Ministers. Coming at a key moment in the development of Soviet ideology under the new President and head of the Communist Party, Konstantin Chernenko, the Resolution is essentially a reaffirmation of the subordination of cinema to political and ideological needs. It signals a clear return to the days when, at the founding Congress of the Union of Film Workers of the Soviet Union in October 1965, the Central Committee of the CPSU firmly stated that film workers 'are expected to maintain a special ideological stability, a clarity of creative ideas. We must constantly see to the ideological level of works of art, and their ability to speak to the broadest of popular masses.'

State control of Soviet cinema -and, more particularly, top level policy declarations on what it should and should not be-has been a prime concern of successive Soviet leaderships. Writers have been under the thumb of ideological dictat ever since the First Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934, when they learned that they would be required to serve Party ideology and the presumed needs of the masses, in that order. The first sign that film production would receive such formal notification of its ideological role came as late as September 1946, when Stalin was free after the war to turn his attention to bringing the industry into line.

The 1946 Resolution of the Party was entitled 'On the Film A Great Life'. The film (directed by Leonid Lukov) dealt with the Ukrainian Donets coal basin, and the people living there, after the Red Army recovered the area from the German occupying forces. The Party Resolution condemned A Great Life not for technical or

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artistic weaknesses, but purely for its failure to present a glossy portrait of the new, postwar Soviet man (and woman). According to the Party, the film 'endows Soviet people with traits entirely alien to our society.' What are those 'traits'? Drunkenness, 'chattering', 'loafing', and petty-minded bureaucracy. Never mind that Lukov was doing his best to capture realism; the prescription for the future was to be that only socialist realism conveys the 'real' meaning of Soviet life.

The most recent Resolution on cinema is little more than a reemphasis of this crude form of tendentiousness. On the ideological front, it shows very clearly the feelings of the new Soviet leadership towards its national film industry. 'Some scriptwriters and directors rarely tackle socially important subjects. Quite a few of the films which are made are still uninteresting, weak and removed from the urgent problems of life and issues of concern to the Soviet people. Some films bring to the foreground far-fetched conflicts, petty irregularities and depressing petty details from everyday life. There are instances of a desire to idealise outmoded moral norms and standards of life, and little use is made of cinematography to combat drunkenness. A number of films lack dynamism, vivid entertainment or attractive positive heroes.

In this the most important passage of the whole Resolution, there is contained the clearest indication to Soviet film-makers that nothing much has changed since the 1940s. The key phrases—'socially important subjects', 'petty details from everyday life', 'attractive positive heroes'—are all reminiscent of a much earlier and politically less educated era.

While Brehznev dallied with artists, enjoying the warm glow to be had from socialising with a cultural elite, and Andropov scarcely had time to reveal his style in cultural affairs, Chernenko has rapidly shown that his tolerance of political deviation is low. The Resolution defers to Chernenko's notion (though it could have come from any Soviet figurehead) that the development of communism entails showing 'constant concern for moulding the man of the new world and for his ideological and moral development.' According to the Resolution, Soviet film and TV has been failing to reveal 'the essence of modern imperialism', and has therefore failed in one of its prime duties. Instead of its backward slide, it must 'participate more actively in the solution of the large and complex tasks of communist education, the enhancement of the masses' labour and social activeness and the economic and social development of the country . . .

Putting it succinctly, the Soviet industry is under general attack (no particular directors or studios are singled out) not only for failing to adhere to the principles of socialist realism, but, even worse, for spinning off into irrelevant allegories or for false representation of reality. Soviet cinema workers must in future, 'Meet the requirements of the present stage of building communism, help improve developed socialism, propagandise the USSR'S Leninist foreign policy, actively expose the aggressive course of imperialism . . . raise the vigilance of the Soviet people and their armed forces and contribute to military-patriotic education.'

Within this tall order there is, almost inevitably, no actual guidance as to how these tasks are to be carried out. The Resolution lays down the law, and filmmakers are left to interpret it as best they can. If they make films within the terms of the Resolution, they still may fail, of course, if the authorities judge that the films 'objectively' fail to meet the required norms.

In the West we are accustomed to a plethora of competing critical theories. But none of these, fortunately, is able to impose on the rest of us a dogmatic and exclusive understanding of cinema. This is not the case in the Soviet Union. Film critics are to 'strive to increase the Marxist-Leninist arsenal' as well as their 'Partyprincipledness and professional skills'. They will, according to the Resolution, be required to overcome instances in their work of 'subjectivism and group bias', and no longer tolerate 'ideological and artistic errors'.

The Resolution stipulates that there must be a sizable increase in the state and regional budgets for film production and distribution, with large numbers of new cinemas to be constructed. There will, interestingly, be a new 'system of material incentives' for those film workers employed on productions specifically ordered by the state. There will also be a 'higher scale of payments for television films which are significant in terms of their ideologicalartistic standard and socio-political content.

But it's not only the domestic audience that is going to be seeing much more of the 'correct' version of reality. The Resolution adds that 'fuller use must be made of the foreign public's increased interest in Soviet films', through more joint productions with developing nations and wider distribution of the more orthodox Soviet-produced films. The international presence of Soviet cinema is not the only aspect of foreign relations that comes under scrutiny. Before foreign productions are bought by the Soviet Union, they will in future face a 'more demanding selection process'.

There are few references in the Resolution to developing a truly communist aesthetic, one which would give room for genuinely individual or collective talent to depict Soviet realities without fear or favour. When the Resolution remembers to mention the need for greater artistic skills, it's always as an afterthought, tacked on to the end of longwinded diatribes about the need for tighter orthodoxy. It is most depressing to think that one of the world's major producers of cinema is still struggling to get beyond the occasional, unbelievably fine accident, such as Stalker, and still believes it necessary and even useful to prohibit its cinema from recovering ground lost since the 1920s

GARY MEAD

## **Promotion**

Selling films in the US with music-videos

Film studios in the United States have discovered a new, free way to guarantee that young people will see parts of their films even before the release date, via rock music-videos. Currently, there's a music-video produced for virtually any new feature which has a good rock and roll song on its soundtrack. The videos are released to local and national television shows and also played in video clubs around the us. The young people who watch videos on television (aged 14-24) are basically the same as the target audience for most Hollywood films-with or without rock soundtracks. These are also the demographics of MTV (Music-Television), the national, 24-houra-day rock video cable channel.

Music-videos, for the uninitiated, are three or four-minute story-

versions of rock songs, and the record industry has of course been producing them in large numbers over the past few years. Videos for films can consist solely of images from the film cut to fit a rock song track (the 'Maniac' video for Flashdance), or they can be a mixture of film footage and original footage shot and edited for this purpose ('The Dream' for D.C. Cab). Budgets fall into the \$20,000 to \$100,000 range. This, however, is the entire cost for this promotional tool. There is no airtime to buy because videos are supplied to television shows as programming. And, thus far, the shows themselves have only had to pay small expenses like licensing fees for the music in new videos.

Flashdance, released Paramount in April 1983, is the acknowledged pioneer in using video to sell a movie. Some music-videos had been done before for films, and Paramount itself had released 'Up Where We Belong', sung by Jennifer Warnes and Joe Cocker, for An Officer and a Gentleman. But that video did not air much because its music did not fit MTV's rock and roll programming guidelines and perhaps because its visuals did not fit the fast-cut style of the most popular pieces on the air

The Flashdance videos came about after producers Jerry Bruckheimer and Don Simpson had seen MTV in New York when it first came on the air. Not only did they create an awareness of the movie which increased its box-office but the videos and the soundtrack album, as well as the film's box-office grosses, all reinforced each other. Paramount has heavily promoted its recent release Footloose, with a musicvideo cut from the film's footage for Kenny Loggins' title track, and it's a mark of video's growing importance that the Footloose



Music-video: The Sorels in Streets of Fire.

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video was also the focus of prerelease club promotions in the Los Angeles area.

Two major studios, Universal and Twentieth Century-Fox, have appointed people specifically to handle this area of promotion. Danny Goldberg is Contemporary Music Consultant at Fox, reporting to Fox's chairman of the board and chief executive Alan Hirschfield. He prefers to have no more than 50 per cent film footage: 'Then the music-videos are viable because they are not perceived by the public as advertising.' At Paramount, however, they do not hesitate to call them advertising. In fact, Paramount publicity refers to the pieces exclusively as 'music trailers'. Warner Brothers goes a step further; they have not yet produced a music-video for a feature, though advertising vicepresident Joel Wayne says they will probably begin doing them this year. 'We tend to put our trailers on music-video shows instead of specially produced material,' he says. He doesn't feel that films like Risky Business and Vacation were hurt at the box-office by not having musicvideos.

Many cable systems have their own music-video shows; even local stations are now producing them. But the acknowledged leader in the field remains Warner-Amex's MTV, which has been appearing nationally on cable systems since August 1981, now has over 18 million subscriber households, and is known to influence everything from record sales to fashion. MTV's musical format is described by John Sykes, vice-president of production and promotion, as 'a blend of rock and roll and the new music that's breaking out of England and Australia and other countries.' He will run a musicvideo from a film 'if the music fits our format.' He has no hard and fast guidelines about how much film footage or specially shot footage it can contain.

If one can't actually say that films have been made just to take advantage of the music-video craze, it is certainly a factor which now comes up early in the planning of productions. For instance, even before Rastar/Columbia's Slugger's Wife began shooting in March 1984, Rastar marketing executive Don Safran was anticipating music-videos for the film being completed six to nine months later. It is expected that this connection between television and films will continue and probably become stronger in the near future. For the television shows, it is essentially free programming. For the companies, it's a way of increasing the film's exposure to the same target audience -and without the cost of buying airtime.

BEČKY SUE EPSTEIN



Joseph Losey, who died on 22 June, with Vanessa Redgrave on the set of *Steaming*, his last film and his first British picture since *The Romantic Englishwoman* in 1975.

## Will Day— Collector

French home for a pioneer British film history

Since the Brighton Conference on the early cinema six years ago, interest in the pre-World War One cinema has mushroomed. In the USA especially, researchers such as Charles Musser, Robert Allan and Noël Burch have gone back to original sources to rewrite the traditional histories. One such source of material on the early British cinema is the Will Day Collection, a treasure trove of early film equipment and accounts of the pioneers. When it was put on sale in the 1960s, it was extraordinary that no one in Britain had the imagination to keep it here. It was snapped up by Henri Langlois for the Cinémathèque Française, through a grant from the then Minister of Culture, André Malraux. For anyone prepared to journey to Paris, Day's marvellous collection of equipment was on show, but most of the documents were locked away until recently when Noelle Giret, an organising whirlwind, decided to catalogue them. Thanks to her, I have now been through most of the material.

The most important document is undoubtedly Day's manuscript history of the origins of the cinema, '25,000 Years to Trap a Shadow'. A film producer himself, Will Day knew many of the pioneers, and it is their stories, as recounted to him, which make up much of his history. Unfortunately

this means that it comes to us through a double filter: that of the unreliability of the pioneers' reminiscences, and also the inevitable bias of the historian who has been involved in the period himself. Many of Day's statements are incorrect; nevertheless much rings true and there is a great deal of previously unknown information.

We read about the first Lumière show in Britain and learn details from the projectionist, Matt Raymond, and the lecturer, M Pochet. We hear of the enterprising Monti Williams, who apparently filmed the Prince of Wales in Cannes harbour in 1896. There are photographs: Mrs Walker, wife of the co-founder of the Walterdaw Film Co, who was 'the first lady projectionist for moving pictures'; a still of a 1901 Western entitled Her Fight for Honour, made in Surrey of all places. More important, there are valuable chronicles of the big companies, including Robert Paul's, which take into account Paul's sales ledgers, long since lost to present historians. There is some interesting documentation about Friese-Greene, especially concerning his demonstration of a ciné camera at Chester in 1890. Material on Paul and Friese-Greene is of particular interest in the light of current reassessments of these two British inventors, and this in my view will result in a more important role being assigned to Friese-Greene and a less important one to Paul. The Cinémathèque Française is considering publishing Will Day's history in an annotated form.

STEPHEN BOTTOMORE

## Preserving

Harold Brown, joining boy of the Archive

Harold Brown, who retired as film preservation officer of the National Film Archive August, joined the British Film Institute staff in April 1935, the month before the Archive (then the National Film Library) was established. Apart from a few years with the Friends Ambulance Unit during the war, he has worked there ever since. When he started there were only eight others on the BFI staff. One of them was the Archive's late curator Ernest Lindgren. Another was Miss Joan Gardener, who had been taken on as a typist the previous year and who in 1945 became Mrs Harold Brown. Young Harold (he was not yet sixteen) immediately became known by his middle name of Godart because 'you couldn't have the office boy sharing the same name as the general manager' (then J. W. Brown)-and Godart he remained till 1950 when Lindgren started calling him Harold. Although he was very soon taken off office work and roped into handling film, he has no recollection of acquiring any relevant job description before 1951, when he was offi-cially given the title he held until his retirement.

In the early years, he says, 'you just did what was called for, and the things you weren't very good at people stopped asking you to do. Nobody was very specialised. Nothing in a sense was big

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enough to occupy anybody fulltime.' He learnt projection, and how to make a join in a piece of film, from the projectionists at the Forum Cinema, Villiers Street (under one of the arches of the Charing Cross railway bridge), and he went to BKS lectures in Wardour Street every week. He learnt how to improve on the projectionists' method of making joins by observing a senior neg cutter salvaging what she could of a dupe of a badly shrunk Méliès film that Lindgren was including in an assembly of early trick films for the loan section, and his interest in the medium was whetted by working as 'joining boy' on Marie Seton and K. H. Frank's compilation Drawings That Walk and Talk (1938) and (even more so) on Cavalcanti's Film and Reality, which was in the making from 1938 to 1942. He always worked in total harmony with Ernest Lindgren, whose policy of saving every frame of film that was conceivably possible he made the basic principle of half a century's preservation effort.

There were no film vaults at the BFI's first premises in Great Russell Street, and the earliest acquisitions were stored in a wet basement somewhere below where Centre Point now stands. By 1937 they had been moved to drier vaults in Denmark Street where Lindgren now had an office, but the collection was expanding so rapidly that it was perhaps fortunate that the fire hazard it presented in central London necessitated finding it a home elsewhere at the beginning of the war. It went temporarily to a farm in Rudgwick, Sussex, where Brown spent about a month arranging it methodically in open stables, where there was sometimes snow outside. Meanwhile Lindgren discovered Aston Clinton, and a local builder constructed the first six vaults inside the stables there, to a design recommended by the technical advisory committee which was effectively repeated on most of the vaults the Archive subsequently built. The house at Aston Clinton was home indeed. Lindgren evacuated his family there for the rest of the war, himself commuting daily to London by Green Line (an hour and threequarters each way). Then the Browns moved in, and after them Frank Holland, manager of the vaults. Now it provides offices to cope with the vastly increased scale of an operation too successful to remain a cottage industry.

Amazingly enough, it was not until 1942 that the awful truth about nitrate film revealed itself at the Archive. In that year Brown remembers handling a film called *The Battle of Lebbeke* (GB, 1914) and finding it sticky although it had seemed abso-

lutely healthy a few months before. So nitrate film was selfdestructive. It was, in Brown's immortal words, 'an inherently unstable chemical compound which, as soon as it is manufactured, begins to decompose.'

Before archives existed it was of little concern to anyone that films were quietly committing suicide in their cans, as long as it was after they had served their purpose in the West End cinemas and done their general release. It was a new concept that yesterday's movies mattered, but when in 1951 the manufacture of nitrate film ceased and Kodak intimated that its lifespan should not be expected to exceed fifty years, it became apparent that the deadline for giving posterity a chance to consider it was around the year 2000. A programme to transfer the whole, ever-increasing holding nitrate film to safety stock by the end of the century has been in operation, under Brown's technical supervision, ever since.

Brown's ingenuity at rescuing living history was dramatically demonstrated by his invention in 1952 of a printing machine which could handle any film that was too shrunk or damaged or otherwise abnormal to be copied by the usual methods: 'The mechanism was my childhood Meccano set plus such pieces of timber and electrical plugs and sockets I could find. I borrowed sprockets from a 1905 Gaumont showman's outfit, a roller from an editola, other bits of things I could solder out of tin-plate, camera tape, rubber bands, paper clips, what the others insisted on referring to as knicker elastic. When I first put the thing together I had no separate motor. To have asked for the price of an electric motor at the time would have been not on in the financial state of the Archive . . .' He recalls sitting up all night copying a two-minute film of a nurse bathing, weighing and dressing a baby (Hepworth's daughter) because the vault corridor he worked in was not dark enough in daytime and,



Harold Brown.

without a motor, the machine (whose virtue is its slowness) took five seconds to print each frame.

Alongside preservation, there have always been major problems of identification which Brown is perhaps the only person to have approached in thoroughly scientific manner. In a paper 'Film Identification by Examination of Film Copies', which he delivered at the 1967 FIAF congress in Berlin, he pointed out that 'identification can sometimes require a skill and experience in research comparable to that applied to ancient manuscripts or prehistoric monuments' and he outlined his own methods and findings in some detail. He also observed that much more work could usefully be done in this field, and appealed to other FIAF members to record their discoveries and pool them for the benefit of all.

'That was seventeen years ago,' he comments, 'and as far as I know we've never had any response from there, and I've never been able to do much more with it. It's just the thing I would like to do. Maybe now I'm not here officially, I might come back and spend more time on it. I hope so, because all it needs in a sense is the films and a bench to wind them on. It's not a problem of accommodation or cost or anything.'

ELIZABETH SUSSEX

## Hong Kong

## Censoring the commodities

Now in its eighth year, the Hong Kong Film Festival is highly regarded internationally for the dedication and contagious en-thusiasm of its organisers, who each year succeed in accomplishing minor miracles in every aspect of festival organisation. Hong Kong is a city still ruled by rigid notions of commodity and value, within which any aspect of culture (film, in this case) has difficulty asserting its status as 'luxury goods'. The power relations therefore tend to function along peculiar lines of mind over matter, where culture may be purchased only if one accepts that 'they' (production companies, funding bodies, etc) don't mind (as long as) you don't matter.

Foreign organisations and individuals have built up misconceptions about Hong Kong, those most current seeming to be fear of film piracy and the general lack of a market to support a festival screening (though, with few exceptions, the volume of business conducted at festivals is shrinking the world over). The diehard spirit of the festival organisers is severely tested each year. Curiously enough, the more

successful they are, the more they are penalised. If they make money, clearly they don't need so large a subsidy next year; if they lose money, they are wasting the subsidy...

The International Section was hampered this year by censorship problems which prevented the screening of Salò, while the booklet accompanying the Pasolini retrospective had to be withdrawn after charges of obscenity. The co-ordinator of this section, film-maker Shu Kei, resigned and gave a press conference which at least allowed the issues to surface and be openly discussed. The co-ordinator of the Asian section, Jerry Lieu, was also dismayed that his Oshima retrospective had to forgo a number of titles for reasons of censor-

One of the most valuable sections of the festival for foreign visitors has been its thorough reinvestigation of Hong Kong films since the 1940s. The documentation collected and commissioned over the last five years represents a major reference point for the understanding of a cinema rich in odd generic mixtures and, until recently, the power of large studios. This year's retrospective and accompanying booklet was devoted to the 1970s: a period dominated at the outset by Mandarin kung fu and ending with the emergence of new directors such as Ann Hui and Allen Fong. This was also the period in which the relations between television and the film industry became the determining factor in the evolution of Hong Kong cinema. As Li Cheuk-to points out in the programme booklet, on the one hand television contributed to the decline of Cantonese features, on the other it 'brought new ideas . . . through its social satires and thrillers' and became the training ground for the new generation of directors. The varied programme afforded the opportunity of seeing Hong Kong classics by directors such as King Hu (Raining in the Mountains), Chu Yuan (House of the 72 Tenants) and Liu Jialiang (Dirty Ho, Executioners from Shaolin). a fair sprinkling of rip-offs from American films (Law Don, 'adapted' from The Godfather) and 'leftist' films like Chen Jingbo's Mud Child.

The festival's Asian section also gives foreign visitors a chance to see work from many countries poorly represented at European festivals. This year, the most surprising films came from Indonesia (Ponirah by Slamet Rahardjio and Roro Mendut by Ami Pryiono) and provided an enticing introduction to the themes and styles of what must be one of the world's least-known cinemas.

DON RANVAUD

## N THE PICTURE



Attack on a Bakery.

## Edinburgh

## Exploitation and rice production

This year's Edinburgh Film Festival, graced with fine weather and a busy box-office, was something of a ·three-tiered affair. Topped by previews of current major releases (Comfort and Joy, Once Upon a Time in America, Paris, Texas, Under the Volcano, etc), it was leavened by the usual crop of exploitation movies and documentaries which are the basic Edinburgh trademarks, while the 40-film Japanese retrospective, covering the years from 1960 onwards, provided a solid base for discovery and disputation.

Of the exploitation movies, Repo Man and Blood Simple were well enough made to make their shabby contents even more oppressive (the former featured a casual tornado of killings; the latter, a coldblooded depiction of a wounded man being buried alive in a field). Now that the genre has moved down an increasingly grimy road since the days of early Corman, one wonders if Edinburgh really wants this 'schlock and splatter' element to gain an upper hand. Certainly, sitting in an audience seemingly determined to giggle and exclaim at every moment of vileness was not a pretty experience.

Some of the documentaries prompted a memory of von Sternberg's remark at a festival back in the late 1960s—'these goddam shorts are getting longer'—but there were pleasant surprises. Ireland's Samuel Beckett—Silence to Silence (by Seán O Mórdha) offered valuable insights into the writer's early life (but not much

on the later work), managing to show him with a human, even witty, face. A little too consciously composed, it offered clips from several plays and stories, the latter sepulchrally intoned David Warrilow. German Pictures (by Hartmut Bitomsky and Heiner Mühlenbrock) subjected the *Kulturfilme* of the 30s to a rather wordy analysis which nevertheless showed how insidious was the Nazi method of indoctrination by repetition. As the film aptly put it, 'the more they showed, the more they

I was only able to see the middle part of the Japanese event, nursed along with great love and attention by its organiser, Tony Rayns. Wide-ranging enough to include big commercial productions as well as various independent groups, plus 16mm and Super-8 experiments, it introduced several new directors to the West and filled in other more familiar names like Imamura, Hani, Yamada, Shinoda, Terayama and Yoshida. The period films were perhaps the least revealing—Jissoji's Life of a Court Lady (1974) made an exciting if excessively mannered use of the Scope screen, with outré compositions garnished with vaseline overlays, and Nakajima's Shogun Assassins (1979) was a lively enough samurai-type romp with comic strip overtones and much rough violence, but little stylistic authority.

Much was made in the accompanying documentation about the spirit of revolt against the constraints of Japanese society and the rigid social values built up after the war. Of the films I saw, however, few directors seemed to go beyond a rather adolescent

slashing out at the world, sometimes literally so in the lurid displays of cruelty and mutilation to be found in films like Matsumoto's Funeral Parade of Roses (1969) and Pandemonium (1971).

It was pleasant to respond fully to one of the youngest talents on display, 27-year-old Naoto Yamakawa, whose short films Attack on a Bakery (1982) and A Girl, She Is 100% (1983) revealed a genuinely fresh invention, using live-action as if it was animation. The former, in particular, about two lads who decide to rob a communist baker, who politely feeds them on condition that they listen to Wagner on his recorder, had a lovely wit and brevity. An earlier feature, Another Side (1980), was less concerned with visual eccentricities, developing instead a delicately shaded study of a group of university students involved in a theatre group. At a literal level, it seemed reminiscent of American 'buddy' movies, but Yamakawa allows his narrative to digress and develop in various unexpected directions and, towards the end, constructs a sequence around a funeral which makes audacious use of completely silent shots and fragmented memories of past and present. Certainly, a name to watch out for in the future.

Possibly the best Japanese film on view was a 31/2 hour documentary called A Japanese Village: Furuyashiki which, when described as a study in rice production and the lives of the predominantly elderly people who scratch out a living (mainly charcoal burning) in their tiny community, would undoubtedly deter even the most valiant audience. And yet, after a first hour comprising a fascinating, strictly scientific, analysis of how winds and temperatures affect rice crops, it expands into a richly detailed study of individual lives. Some extraordinary cinéma-vérité interviews include one with an extremely loquacious old soldier who tells wicked tales about his army career and ends up, fully uniformed, blowing his bugle on the mountainside. The director Shinsuke Ogawa and his crew lived in the area for three years, and their familiarity with the conditions, topography and attitudes of the people shines out in every sequence. At the end, as an old lady hobbles along a road chatting away to the tracking camera, we see the White South (mist) slowly coming in again across the mountains and, suddenly, people and place are unified into a single vision of existence.

JOHN GILLETT

## FILMS OF THE FIFTIES

The 1985 British Film Institute Calendar features twelve stills from the films of the Fifties. Each still is accompanied by a caption giving details of the film and setting it in the context of the period. Copies are available from the Publications Department, BFI, 81 Dean Street, London W1V 6AA (at £4.95 each inc p & p.



# 28TH LONDON FILM FESTIVAL



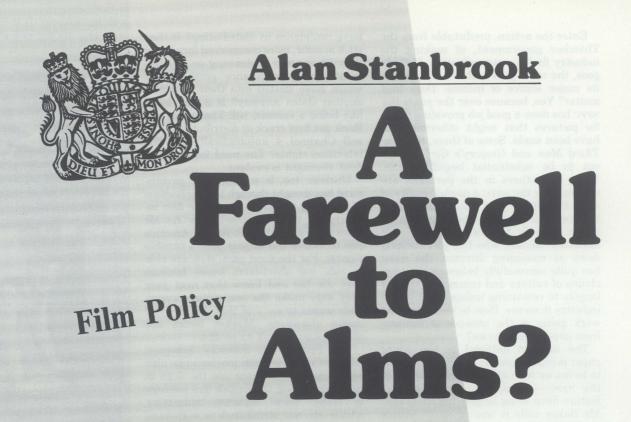
## 15 NOVEMBER – 2 DECEMBER 1984

NATIONAL FILM THEATRE, SOUTHBANK, WATERLOO, LONDON SEI 8XT BOX OFFICE 01-928 3232









hw the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

'Our policy is to free the film industry from government intervention and from an intrusive regulatory regime dating from the days of the silent films. Our policy will clear the way for the industry to operate in a more confident framework and to consolidate upon its success.'

> -Kenneth Baker, Minister of State for Industry and Information Technology.

By the time it was eventually published, in July, Kenneth Baker's long-delayed white paper on the film industry had become so like a colander that there was little left to leak. Everybody knew that the Eady levy was to be scrapped and most people were resigned to the disappearance of the National Film Finance Corporation, which depends on Eady for a crucial £1.5m of its funding. Some form of successor company, involving participation from the private sector, had also been widely canvassed.

Mr Baker sees his white paper as part of the Tories' doctrinal commitment to get government off industry's back. Consistent with it is the abolition of the cinema quota and the withdrawal of what are seen as distorting mechanisms, like 100 per cent first-year capital allowances. This last concession was a major incentive to investment in the film industry. Since the Chancellor withdrew it in the budget, at least three films that might have been shot in Britain are believed to have decamped abroad in search of better tax breaks. Few in the movie industry see the recent extension of the business

expansion scheme to film-making as more than token compensation. For one thing, tax relief is limited to £40,000.

The interest in the white paper lies principally in what is left uncertain, particularly with regard to who is to control some £10m of public money. One of its greatest ironies is that a document that is meant to play a part in sweeping away statutes, legislation and direct government intervention in the movie business may lead to more problems of administration and scrutiny than ever

One of the few planks in the programme for which there is almost universal approval is the despatch of the Eady levy. A complicated tax on cinema takings, whose proceeds were intended to be recycled back to the producers to reward success and encourage fresh endeavour, it had become an onerous burden on exhibitors in a time of dwindling admissions. The net yield is now no more than £4.5m, the same as in 1967, despite subsequent inflation.

From this, the NFFC collects its £1.5m and a number of other organisations (including the British Film Institute) get small payments, amounting to £635,000 in all and leaving little more than half the net levy for redistribution to producers. But they do not even keep this. Because of the need to secure distribution guarantees from the Hollywood majors, up to two-thirds of that part of the Eady money that is earmarked for producers finds its way into other hands.

Nobody, except perhaps the American majors, will be sorry to see it go, though the exhibitors will be expected to channel the savings into the refurbishment of cinemas rather than pocket the windfall. (But who is to see that they do?) For the government, a significant consideration was whether Eady should be abolished outright or replaced by another levy. Several possibilities were considered. When Eady became statutory in 1957, the cinemas were still cows worth milking, but annual admissions since then have shrunk from 900m to only 66m. Better cows in 1984 might be a tax on movies shown on television or on blank video cassettes. Further down the line, cable and direct broadcasting might also be asked to contribute.

Eady-clones were rejected, however, or at least deferred, for what sound like good reasons. Taxing movies shown on television would (a) force the BBC to seek an increase in its licence sooner and greater than the government would want; (b) amount to a double burden on the independent television companies, who already help to finance movies through their contributions to Channel 4; and (c) reduce the profits of ITV and hence the Exchequer levy that derives from them.

Taxing blank videotapes is a controversial topic in its own right. The government may be shifting its ground on this after an initial outright rejection. At least it is prepared to think again. In due course, it will issue a green paper on the subject. Mr Baker himself is in two minds, but feels that if there is a case to be made for such a levy, it should be

built on the argument of copyright protection rather than regarded as a convenient way of replacing Eady.

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Enter the notion, predictable from the Thatcher government, of making the industry find its own salvation. If Eady goes, the NFFC goes with it since that is its major source of income. Does that matter? Yes, because over the years the NFFC has done a good job providing funds for pictures that might otherwise not have been made. Some of these, like The Third Man and Gregory's Girl, turned out to be substantial box-office hits. They, and others in the portfolio, are still earning the NFFC a useful royalty of some £200,000 a year, though Mr Baker believes that more vigorous exploitation might be able to double that. Under Mamoun Hassan, who has just stepped down as managing director, the NFFC has quite successfully balanced the twin claims of culture and commerce, thanks largely to remaining independent of the industry it serves. How to keep the good work going in the absence of funding from government levies?

The solution outlined in the white paper is controversial. A new company is to be set up with aims similar to those of the NFFC-to help finance low-budget feature films using largely British talent. Mr Baker calls it 'son of NFFC'; critics might say it was conceived on the wrong side of the blanket. Though the government will have one director on the board and the right to approve the chairman, this will be essentially a private-sector company. Thorn EMI, Rank Organisation, Channel 4 and companies represented by the British Videogram Association will chip in a total of £1.1m a year for three years. The new company will also inherit the royalties in past pictures with which the NFFC was associated. Some have already called this tantamount to asset stripping.

Parallel to the new company, the government will set up a fund, furnished with £1.5m a year for five years, to engage in co-productions. Though it has been interpreted as a five-year subvention of £7.5m to a private company, this may not be the case. Whoever administers the fund can monitor the company's progress and, if necessary, vote with his purse. Whether it will work that way in practice will depend on who is in charge, both of the successor to the NFFC and of the government fund.

The white paper leaves some doubt as to whether there will be adequate safeguards. A new film industry advisory body is to be set up to replace the Cinematograph Films Council and Lord Wilson's Interim Action Committee, but its powers as a watchdog will be limited since it is to be non-statutory, 'for greater flexibility'. How any shortcomings or potential abuses in the proposed system are to be policed is the area of the white paper most in need of clarification.

Mamoun Hassan has said that he sees in the new arrangement 'massive opportunity for conflict of interest'. In this he is spot on. In their capacity as participants in NFFC mark 2, companies like Thorn EMI and Rank will find it hard to reconcile their interests as distributors. Will they want to make slightly risky, low-budget pictures that they might not

have confidence in distributing? If they stick to safer, more commercial fare, could they be accused of drawing on government money to finance projects that would have slotted into their own production slates anyway? If a film looks like being a success, will Thorn EMI and Rank get first crack at distribution? And will Channel 4 automatically get the television rights? The need for independent oversight is evident.

Unclear, too, is whether the government has thought through the implications of shunting the problems of the film industry on to the marketplace. As Mr Hassan points out, each year in America one or two of the majors take a terrible tumble. For the most part, they are able to ride out short-term losses because they are big and know that next year they may make the one picture everybody wants to see and that disaster will strike elsewhere. Market forces are about losses as well as profits.

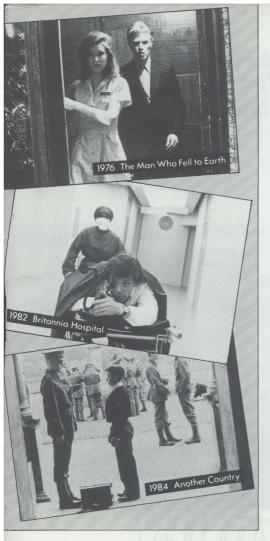
The British film industry, however, does not make enough movies to be able to average out the hits and the flops in this way. Indeed, the British film industry is really three separate industries, which are not structured to withstand heavy buffeting. Though very expensive films (like the James Bond series) will generally find finance from America, and those with a small enough budget can recoup their investment through television, medium-sized ones that cost too much to rely on television alone are most likely to be squeezed out in a market free-for-all. These movies, of which one of the most recent is Another Country, are those that have traditionally been helped by the NFFC.

Inevitably, the more controversial elements in the white paper, those relating to Eady and the NFFC, overshadowed a number of the Minister's more constructive proposals. These include £500,000 a year for five years to the National Film Development Fund, which would otherwise expire with its parent (the NFFC), and a one-off payment of £250,000 to enable the National Film and Television School to upgrade its television facilities. The annual £500,000 which the school currently receives from Eady is to be replaced in future by a £600,000 contribution from the film and television industries.

And the BFI? Its modest £125,000 from Eady, which is not a prescriptive right but amounts to a tenth of the Production Board's present budget, is not to be cut off dead. It is planned to make a final disbursement from the Eady levy, 'which will go some way towards the sums that the BFI would otherwise expect.' After that, presumably, there will be nothing.

There was little enthusiasm for the Baker package in the film industry, other than from the Cinematograph Exhibitors Association and the Association of Independent Cinemas, which are naturally delighted to see the back of Eady. The main criticism is that the white paper is mostly cosmetic. The Association of Independent Producers was quick to carp. 'A bit of a fudge,' was

Some of over 700 films supported by the NFFC since 1949. 1949 The Third Man 54 Belles of St. Trinians 1960 Saturday Night and Sunday Morning Family Life



International

**Film Festival** 

how AIP's Marc Samuelson described it. 'It enables Baker to sit back and do nothing further.'

Giants like Rank and Thorn EMI, he points out, are to put into the new company only a fraction of what they will save through not paying the Eady levy. 'Will they use the savings to open cinemas in the new suburbs, like Watford, for example?" He also deplores the fact that the government's major policy statement on the film industry, which has taken a year and a half to complete, has nothing new to say about the practices of barring and alignment, which were so strongly condemned in the Monopolies Commission report of May 1983. Though that report called for their abolition, there is still no indication of what action the government is to take.

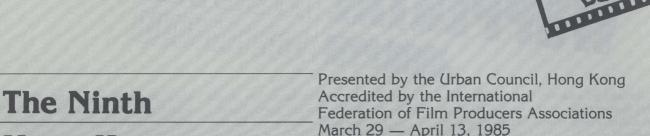
As for the money the government will make available to finance new production, 'It would not even be sufficient to fund one low-budget feature film a year.' An opportunity, Samuelson thinks, was missed in not making the video and television industries pick up the Eady tab. By his calculation, 'properly structured levies could raise approximately £35m per annum.' Maybe, but to this government that would smack too much of intervention.

In Samuelson's view, everything proposed in the white paper is a 'gnat's bite compared with the loss of capital allowances.' Other organisations on the production side agree. The Directors

Guild of Great Britain is especially sore about the Minister's failure to address the consequences of the withdrawal of old-style allowances. It regards the entire document as 'suffused with a Panglossian faith that all is for the best in a deregulated world.' The fact is, however, that the British film renaissance, in which the government rightly takes pride, has, for good or ill, been a product of the allowances that are now being withdrawn. Therefore 'the key assumptions of the paper are completely invalid.'

Ken Maidment, president of the British Film and Television Producers Association, has also identified a small but significant casualty of the end of Eady and the repeal of the present raft of film legislation. With the abandonment of the register of films that qualified as British for quota and Eady purposes, it will no longer be possible to say what a British film is and the industry will lose its identity. If there is no special incentive to maintain minimum British crews and casts to be eligible for Eady payments, there is a danger (especially when sterling is weak) that 'British' movies will just be American ones on location.

What can the industry do about it? Not much with regard to the broad outlines, but lobbying may ensure that the details are refined and the gaps filled in. A concerted campaign can be expected as the white paper's recommendations wend their way through parliament.

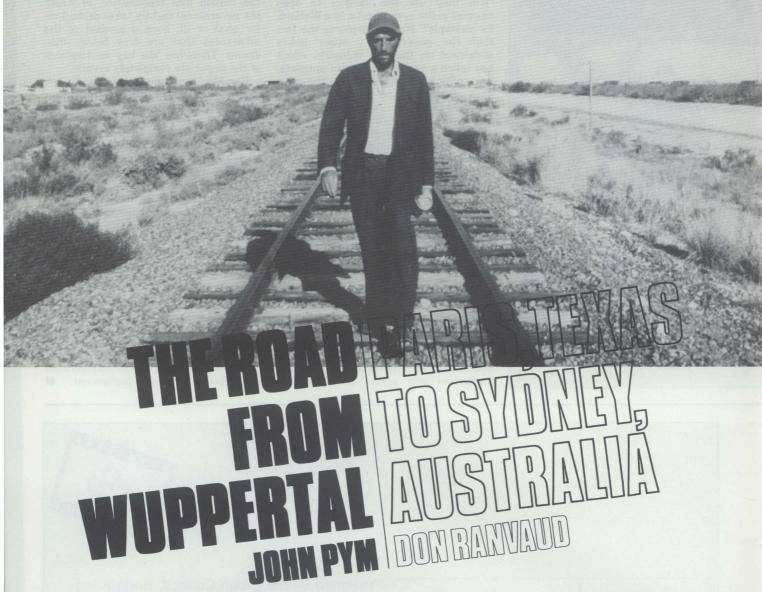


## Hong Kong Information:

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## The route from Alice in the Cities to Paris, Texas; and an interview with their director, Wim Wenders, and his collaborator, producer Chris Sievernich



A homing jet crosses the sky. When we first discover him, at the start of Alice in the Cities, Philip Winter, a forlorn young German, played by that most forlorn of actors Rüdiger Vogler, is slouched on a vacant American beach, far from home, taking Polaroid pictures of the grey Atlantic. Try as he may, however, the photographs obstinately refuse to reflect what he sees. They will not confirm his own reality. He is on assignment from a German magazine to gauge the State of America, or some such, and his problem with the pictures brings into focus a more general difficulty: he is drifting, blocked, unable to finish the article. Philip subsequently reports to the magazine's New York office. He has missed his deadline, but being, it seems, wholly self-centred as well as forlorn the thought of an apology never crosses his mind. He will finish the text back in Munich. As this hopeless baggy 'investigator' backs, blank-faced, out of the door, one feels for the irate man who was fool

enough to commission him. One would like to give Philip a really good shake.

Philip is one of life's mooners. Earlier, having ordered a drink at an eaterie in the middle of some suburban nowhere, he looks blankly out of the window, deaf to the voice which is offering him change. A moment later, we see the director of the film, Wim Wenders, another transient, putting money in a jukebox and then staring equally blankly out of another window. Look, the scene seems to say, the director and his leading player ask nothing more than to ride in a hired automobile with the radio on while the scenery of the other side of the tracks slides past the windscreen. Wenders is there to be recognised: his braces, for the cinephile, are as familiar as Hitch's profile. A glimpse of a newspaper obituary of John Ford is another signpost for the devotee. To the paying public at large, who might enjoy a John Ford film but would not recognise the director's face, the leisurely beginning to Alice in

the Cities is if not downright trying at least cause for restlessness. But then matters are remedied. Someone does give Philip a really good shake.

It is, of course, Alice, the blonde nineyear-old tomboy, who jolts the picture into life. Her mother, played by the young Lisa Kreuzer, is helplessly abstracted; she cannot muster the English necessary to buy an airline ticket back to Europe. She is as sunk within herself as Philip, although her problem-and Alice at this particular moment is only an encumbrance—is how to sort out her current relationship with a man not Alice's father. Like all mooners, Philip is easy prey. He books the ticket for her, in a small, unconsidered way acts the Good Samaritan and, before he knows it, finds himself in charge of the self-possessed child. Her mother has disappeared with the vague promise of a rendezvous the day after tomorrow in Amsterdam. The film then finds both its narrative and its thematic

focus as Philip, who has flown to Amsterdam with Alice, begins a quest, when the mother fails to materialise, for

the girl's grandmother.

The searchers head for Wuppertal, where Alice believes her grandmother lives: she does not know where, but she will recognise the house when she sees it. Needless to say, she doesn't, and Philip hands her over in temporary exasperation to the police. She escapes, rejoins him, produces a previously forgotten photograph of her grandmother's house and off they drive—their purpose now to match the photograph with what they see-into the immensity of the Ruhr. They find the house, but the grandmother has moved, and the present Italian occupants have no news of her. Like some latter-day cowboy, saddlesore from many fruitless and lonely years on the range, Philip, it seemed, had at last been given his opportunity to do something useful, to restore a little girl, on whose sturdy shoulders the future rested, if not to her flighty mother then at least to her grandmother's solid homestead. Failure now looks him in the face. However, the writer-director has a kindly, not to say sentimentally Fordian streak, and all is made well by the intervention of a policeman who chances on Philip and Alice on board a ferry. The mother has arrived, the grandmother has been located: Alice, he says, must be put on a train to Munich. Philip smiles with open-hearted pleasure for the first time in the film. At the station, Alice produces a hundred dollar bill and gives it to Philip; he accepts it with only a moment's hesitation; their bond is sealed. In the train, Alice asks what he will do. 'Finish this story,' he replies.

The principal achievement of Alice in the Cities, made in 1974, photographed by Robby Müller and edited by Peter Przygodda, is one of transformation. The commonplace becomes intensely, vividly real: the view from a hotel window; children leaving school; an airport concourse; a street of detached middle-class houses; an elderly couple taking the air, surprised to be asked directions. And it is the singular talent of Wenders and his collaborators to invest this subtly choreographed 'documentary' realism (no matter that we never discover how Alice gave the slip to the police) with an understated but nevertheless universal melancholy poeticism. What, however, makes the film consistently watchable is that old device of the two mismatched individuals thrown together on the road. Alice, for all her self-possession, will still duck beneath the covers when Philip, asked for a bedtime story, angrily shouts that he does not know any. But she is, for all her childishness, at home in the modern world-of TV slot machines in airports, of cellophane-wrapped meals on international flights, of motel rooms and hired cars—in a way that Philip is not. She is too, of course, the daughter he has never had; the chance, that oldfashioned humanist chance, for him to redeem himself by returning her to her family-and thus perhaps losing her himself.



Alice in the Cities: The windscreen and the cityscape.

Ten years have passed. An eagle flaps down on an outcrop of rock. Robby Müller's camera has a moment earlier swept sinuously down from the sky to discover Travis, another lost soul, valiantly plodding across the Texas nowhere. Philip, one imagines, looked up at the homing jet crossing high above his beach; Travis gives the eagle a look as hawklike and inscrutable as the one he gets back. The landscape is no longer urban; but the settlement into which Travis, the cadaverous, catatonic Harry Dean Stanton (a minor-role player who has finally, justly been given his chance) stumbles has the feel of a Western nohope town, flyblown, arid and barely populated. It is not that one feels that poor Travis, who after four years has returned to civilisation from beyond the grave, wearing, it seems, the same suit in which he disappeared, could do with a really good shake; he is past the point of self-salvation. He is in such a dilapidated state, indeed, that one would be in danger of shaking the life out of him.

Paris, Texas, directed by Wim Wenders, edited by Peter Przygodda, winner of the Grand Prix at Cannes, a big picture which arrives trailing a host of production stories about jiggery-pokery with the script (the ending was a problem), is at heart about that one small moment when a child is restored to his mother and the world is put momentarily to rights. In the ten years between Alice in the Cities and Paris, Texas, Wenders has executed a genuinely varied list of films. Elsewhere in this issue Thomas Elsaesser points to the chameleonlike gift of the German émigré film-makers in the Paris of the 30s: their ability to make better 'French' films, in some ways, than the French themselves. Wenders, fifty years on, displays a talent for taking this one step further, by taking the thriller (The American Friend), the detective story

(Hammett) and the Western (Paris, Texas), those quintessentially Hollywood genres, demonstrating that he has assimilated their lore, and then turning them upside down—giving them a shake—to startling effect.

Dazzling though these displays were (and even such a blocked picture as *The State of Things* was full of threadbare invention), one did not feel flowing through them that small, curious, indefinable heartbeat that one felt in *Alice in the Cities*. Not, that is, until *Paris, Texas*. And the reason is not far to seek: the latter film is a brilliant variation on the theme of the first, richer, more complex and ultimately more deeply moving.

Travis, it transpires, has a son, Hunter, a little younger than Alice but bearing a physical resemblance to her. In the years that Travis has been away (and why he went away is until almost the end the film's close-kept secret), Hunter has been brought up, at the request of his mother Jane, by Travis' younger brother Walt, a billboard contractor, and his French wife Anne. But, before coming to the heart of the matter, I should say a word or two about the tone and texture of the film. Alice in the Cities was marked by a distinctively washedout black and white, the images seemed slightly overexposed and the overall impression was of a story seen through a fine spray, a melancholy sea mist. Time eloquently passed in black fadeouts. The mist has now dispersed and the daylight images are suffused with bright clear light. The colour has a cutting edge. Philip, being an essentially grey person, sometimes seemed to disappear into the tone of the background; Travis and all the characters in Paris, Texas stand out in confident relief.

While a sort of poetic melancholy pervaded Alice, and one made more

piquant by the film's shafts of humour, what Wenders and his writers Sam Shepard and L. M. Kit Carson square up to in Paris, Texas is a genuine, multilayered tragedy. The film's plot is not only more complex but the manner in which it observes its commonplace objects—the airport concourse, a pool of hired cars, a billboard going up, children leaving school, the freeway traffic-is more purposeful and striking. One is washed over by the images of Alice in the Cities, and occasionally brought up sharp by their beauty, by the light, say, glinting on the edge of the wing of a jetplane; but in Paris, Texas each image seems to have a point of its own. We slide past the houses of Wuppertal and the act of sliding is the point; but, when we go up a hill in suburban Los Angeles, the houses are a backdrop for the action. This purposefulness carries over, crucially, into the characters themselves. Philip Winter backs out of his editor's office because he has no answer for his angry boss; Travis Anderson forces a taxiing plane to stop and let him and Walt off because he positively does not want to fly. That dilapidated frame in fact conceals a true heart and hawklike tenacity.

In Alice in the Cities, all the relationships are transitory. Philip beds down with women he hardly knows: it is a friendless world. Walt and Anne, however, who have no children of their own and have grown to love the watchful, self-possessed Hunter with an anxious intensity, are those rarest of cinematic characters, a believable and wholly likeable pair of golden-hearted parents. They have taken Hunter permanently into their home, but when his father turns up Walt unhesitatingly drops everything and goes to retrieve him, coaxing Travis on the long journey back to Los Angeles first into hesitant conversation and then a hazy recognition of who he is and the responsibilities he is returning to. In the film's long opening passage, before Travis meets his son, our sympathy deepens for patient, chainsmoking Walt who finds himself in a double bind. If Travis recovers, as Walt hopes, he will take the son whom Walt and Anne consider their own. In the event, both Walt and Anne (played with exemplary understatement by Dean Stockwell and Aurore Clément) behave with honour; and it is their poignant loss, when Travis having been gentled back to health finally departs with Hunter to seek Jane, which runs beneath the surface of the rest of the film, deepening what will eventually be Travis' equally honourable loss.

Old photographs have an abiding fascination for Wim Wenders. The boxful of Polaroids, the unremarkable house in Wuppertal are talismans for Philip and Alice. And in *Paris*, *Texas*, Travis carries a photo-booth snap of himself, his wife and their son, but also a picture of a plot of land in the desolate place of the title where he once hoped to create a home for them. Why Paris, Texas? Walt and Travis' mother (and there she is preserved in a photograph album) used,



Alice in the Cities: The nine-year-old tomboy (Yella Rottländer).

Travis remembers, to trick strangers: Travis, she claimed, had been conceived in Paris-she would pause, letting the notion of what a person of substance she was sink in, before adding 'Texas' not 'France'. Photographs underscore that old Western notion of continuity and inheritance: of ploughing, in a sense, the land where your father first sowed the seed. But Wenders extends this motif in a bravura sequence in which Travis and his son finally recognise each other. Walt rigs up a home movie of a trip to the seaside. We watch the two fathers, the mother and their son gaze at the flickering, obscured image of the absent Jane, larking on a boardwalk, and flooded each differently with memories of a happy, lost past. Philip Winter, lounging on his beach regarding the Atlantic, was suddenly moved to an ironic comment: he tunelessly sings the refrain of the old Drifters' song: 'Under the boardwalk,/Down by the sea,/On a blanket with my baby,/That's where I wanna be.' Here now is that long ago moment, fixed in time on an old-fashioned spool of film.

Before Travis and Hunter go on the road together, they become an odd couple:

Travis is in many ways the child (he once dresses up as the 'authoritative father' and goes to meet Hunter from school), while his son takes on the practicalities of fatherhood (the walkie-talkie they take on their quest will, he knows, come in handy). Philip and Alice similarly reversed their roles: she knew he should have eaten something before their flight to Amsterdam, even if only a cellophane-wrapped sandwich; now he has a headache and needs an aspirin . . . The father, Travis, becomes the son, because, in a sense, he failed in his proper role; and Hunter becomes the father because he lost the opportunity to be a son. The purpose of their quest is not to restore what turns out to be an impossible broken family, but to give Hunter (played by Hunter Carson, son of the writer) his rightful relationship with his mother.

The uniform greyness, both literal and thematic, of *Alice in the Cities* was part of its point. Nothing, however, that has come before, and the narrative is full of twists, the images full of startling variety, can quite prepare us for the climax of *Paris*, *Texas*. Jane (Nastassja Kinski) is traced via the bank at which



Paris, Texas: Journey's end (Hunter Carson and Nastassja Kinski).

she has been making small monthly deposits for Hunter to a peepshow house; a place where, through a two-way mirror, the world's lonely transients can have acted out-as if on a cinema screensome, buried, unfulfilled dream. The fantasy that Jane and Travis act out, with her at first unable to see him, and he at first almost unable to confront her, is that of their own married life and how. with the birth of Hunter, it became insupportable. The two-way mirror is the correlative of their old relationship, a perfect metaphor for their inability to reach each other; and Wenders' use of it is supreme evidence of his skill as a filmmaker. At first we see matters only from Travis' darkened room: Jane's eyes searching vainly for the face of the man speaking to her. After a long, tantalising delay, the angle is reversed and with a shock we see the other side of the dark mirror from her brightly lit stage set. Travis and Jane pour out their hearts; but even at the end, with a makeshift alteration of the lights, they cannot really see each other; they remain irrevocably separated. We cannot hope for reconciliation, Wenders asserts, but only for remembrance, of fragments of happiness, the horseplay on the boardwalk, the day by the sea, running like a loop through the mind.

There is nothing for it: if they meet outside this tawdry dream palace, their ages, their temperaments, everything that has occurred during their separation, even their adored son, will contrive again to drive a wedge between them. Travis finds the strength at last to act, to play the father, to return Hunter to Jane and thus perhaps save her from the servitude of her profession. He sends them into each other's arms in (where else?) a hotel room in another town, and as they cling in mute relief that the journey is now over, Travis gets into his car and drives into the night. If you are looking for an image which sums up that curious and sometimes uneasy creature the Road Movie, this surely is it. But this is not the end of the neat story which Philip has returned to Munich to write: this one has in a sense only just begun. Walt and Anne are left in the empty house from whose garden Travis watched the jets depart; Hunter and Jane must make an uncertain life together; and Travis, who acted as he had to, how will he now make shift?

# PARIS, TEXAS FROM PYM DON RANVAID

In the summer of 1978, Wim Wenders hopped from Bali to Darwin to make his way across the Australian continent. Like Travis in Paris, Texas, he wandered through the deserts of the Northern Territory looking for fragments of stories buried in the parched, desolate landscape and taking a lot of pictures. Armed with a stack of notebooks full of ideas, he hitchhiked to Sydney to visit the only person he knew (David Stratton, who else?) and to dump the rolls of film he had accumulated so that they could be processed and printed. Like Alice in the cities, he grew restless and trekked all the way back, thinking 'I can't go home again', not yet, at least-no money. He never did make it home. Halfway through his journey he received a telegram in a small-town post office which had been redirected by Stratton in Sydney. Francis Coppola was inviting him to San Francisco to 'kick around' the idea of making Red Harvest. The rest, as they say, is movies (or not, as the case may be).

In the summer of 1984, Wenders returned to Australia, but this time it was a different story. A nonstop, Pan Am Business Class from Los Angeles, a penthouse suite at the Hyde Park Plaza and troubleshooters everywhere to protect his privacy. As the honoured guest of the Sydney Film Festival he was expected to preside over the screening of

Paris, Texas (only weeks after the Cannes triumph) and help to promote the film in an efficient sort of way. Having finally broken the shackles of his shyness, he made a virtue of necessity and seemed almost to enjoy the occasions that a few years ago he would perform only with great reluctance. But as soon as the dust settled, he disappeared into the desert to

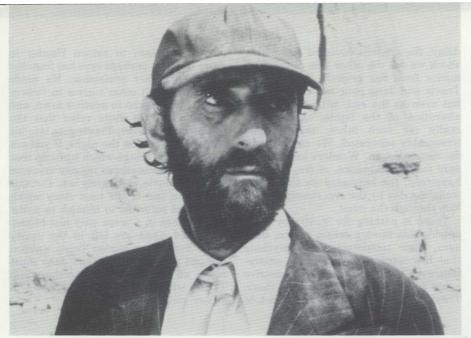
rekindle the memories recollected from his faded notebooks.

'When I was here last, I thought I would be back within a year,' Wenders said at his press conference. 'The notes I had made were coming together around a science fiction story which was to be set in the outback in 1999. It was called *The End of the Century*. It feels great to be back, to visit Alice (Springs, that is) and to know that perhaps now I am really getting ready to shoot this picture.'

The problem is that he will have to wait a year (well, we have heard that before) because he is already working on another, more pressing project, as yet untitled, which will take him round the world a couple of times: 'It's a film about a woman chasing a guy and being chased in turn by two men from airport to airport; probably Tokyo, Hong Kong, Rome, the us. A thriller with the most varied locations you can imagine.' The script is nearly finished and after the success of Paris, Texas, the financing is coming together fast, but no dates have been set at the time of writing. I suppose it will now be possible to talk about road

Wim Wenders and Polaroid image.





Paris, Texas: Travis Anderson (Harry Dean Stanton).

movies in the sky and a sort of international independent movie movement in the true sense of the term.

Probably the most important thing that happened to Wim Wenders (in terms of his career) between his two visits to Australia was joining forces with Chris Sievernich. With the obvious exception of Hammett, Sievernich has produced all his films since Lightning Over Water and won both the Golden Lion in Venice (The State of Things) and the Palme d'Or in Cannes (Paris, Texas). It was also the major difference between the two trips to Australia, since Chris Sievernich came along, among other things, to start 'fixing' The End of the Century.

Apart from being a trusting, loyal friend (and Wenders through Hammett and Lightning Over Water needed that perhaps above all else), Sievernich is simply the most imaginative and dynamic producer on the international scene today. Who else possesses a pilot's licence, speaks an assortment of languages and dares to risk another picture immediately before the full impact of the boxoffice failure of the previous one hits home (the case of Chris Petit's quick double Flight to Berlin and Chinese Boxes). This principle of 'breaking your opponent's service immediately if you lose your own' extends to the manner of financing what on paper look like impossible projects. Paris, Texas, for instance, was financed from nine different sources for a total of just over two million dollars, which amounts to one-sixth of the budget of the average film now being produced in Hollywood, according to Variety. In spite of many negotiations, not one cent came from American sources, whose rigid mechanisms for backing movies tend to constrain any project out of existence or raise the overall budget to astronomical figures—a sort of cock-eyed view of supply and demand where the (small) supply is wiped out by 'knock on' demands and guarantees against making the film at all rather than against 'loss'.

As Sievernich puts it, 'American money for pictures is so expensive to buy, and that applies to both studios and tax shelter sponsors.' So they decided in the end to drop attempts to raise money in the us and keep control of the film and the sales until the bitter end. 'We didn't want more money than we got and we will keep to the same basic principle for our next picture,' stresses Sievernich. 'We will continue, that is, to operate on a multi-sponsor basis and keep away from the sharks. In that way the two fundamental issues in making films nowadays, trust and confidence in the project, are maximised to the full.' It's a far cry from New York, where shortly before their departure they were met in the street by the first assistant on Hammett, who was shuffling his way around the question of the budget for his first feature and then apologetically said, 'Well, it's only going to be four million bucks, it's a small movie.'

Meanwhile sales for Paris, Texas are going well, except for the United States, though Sievernich is confident they will eventually get the deal they are after: 'It was clear in Cannes, even after the award, that we would go with the independent distributors and think hard about what kind of release was being offered as well as how much money was on the table. Only in this way can you secure the full commitment of people who still care about the cinema and the type of product they handle."

The last time Wim and Chris took some time off was in Austria, after they decided that unfortunately the film they had planned to make with Peter Handke was not going to happen at that time: 'We had been working for six months and had written a 250-page script," Wenders said. 'We were going to shoot it in Austria and Germany-a coming home of sorts after State of Things. I think it was so good we all got scared and the finance just couldn't be put together. It's the first project I had ever had to drop and I was quite shattered, but Chris was right. He knew we weren't going to get anywhere and encouraged me to think of something else to avoid getting stuck. So I started to read Sam Shepard's Motel Chronicles in a motel in Austria and began to work on it right away. I had

known Sam for seven years and we always had the idea of making a film together, since Hammett, that is.' At the time Shepard was not quite as bankable as he is now, and Wenders was particularly attracted to the Journal mode of writing, fragmenting narratives and working by association. But when he came to rewrite the book with the idea of making the film he ended up producing the kind of linearity that Shepard had deliberately, though spontaneously, scrambled. Shepard wasn't at all happy with the results. So they decided to start again from scratch, abandoning Motel Chronicles altogether and shutting themselves into a motel for a week simply trading stories.

The first element that began to come into place was Travis, then his brother and then his son. I had been living on and off for six years in the United States; I had made three and a half films there and still hadn't been able to express what I felt.' This project was beginning to pull all the strands together. True to Shepard's training as a playwright, the structure of the film soon centred on three 'acts': Travis being found by his brother, Travis with Hunter in Los

Angeles, Jane's version.

We really didn't know what was going to happen next. The beginning of a script is always the tightest part. It either becomes inscribed in stone, as it were, or the film just won't work. But throughout the writing we kept questioning elements we had chosen at the beginning. By the time we got to the third part, for instance, we thought it was curious to have thought of two brothers.' Chris takes up the narrative: 'Pre-production lasted thirteen months and we tried to develop the concept which I described earlier for financing the film. That took eight exhausting months. Having raised two million in three countries from nine sources, we spent three months location-scouting across the United States and had to stop four times because it looked as though the money (or part of it) was going to disappear. The most disastrous thing that happened to us, which wiped out three hundred thousand dollars in one go, was the strength of the dollar. We didn't have any American cash, and just in getting the money to the States we lost one-sixth of the financing."

Wim shrugs his shoulders, as if to say he could have made another one for that money, and continues: 'Originally we wanted to spend a minimum of twelve weeks filming. There was so much travelling and so many different things to take into account about availability of the actors we wanted and so on. When this currency problem hit us, we were forced to cut the schedule to ten weeks. Then we actually did it all in seven and a half weeks.' Even the post-production period—the time Wenders feels is the happiest moment in making a film is when he sits down for the first day of editing-was cut to five months. 'We worked nonstop with three editors and still only arrived in Cannes with the print on the day of the screening.'

Asked at the press conference about the dedication of the film to Lotte Eisner, Wim replied: 'Lotte Eisner is a crucial figure for all of us in the so-called New German Cinema. It was such a blow to me that she died during the shooting that I thought the least I could do was to pay tribute like this. She represents for me the age of innocence in the cinema, you know; Adam and Eve before they were thrown out of the movie theatre!'

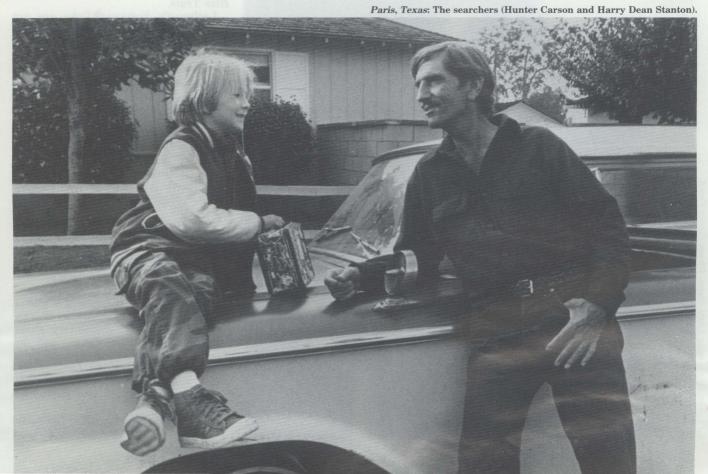
Perhaps the most controversial aspect of Paris, Texas is the ending, in which Travis reunites his son Hunter with the boy's mother. Sam Shepard was adamant that Travis should leave with Hunter and continue his travels; Harry Dean Stanton kicked and screamed until the bitter end because he just didn't want to leave Jane and Hunter. They got to the point of filming another ending in Super-8 which was to act as a postcard from Jane and Hunter to Travis saying: 'We would both love to see you again.' 'In the end,' sighs Wim, 'I felt there were no options for me. I think the scene between Harry Dean and Nastassja in the peepshow is the best thing I have ever done in the cinema, and the power of that scene brought me to the conclusion that to have any other ending would be to run against the grain of that scene and diminish the overall effect. As we were filming, I realised that Harry Dean had always wanted a child and Nastassja was pregnant. They both gave so much in that, I was stunned. Nastassja had asked me if she shouldn't have a Texan accent, given that she had been living there for most of the action of the film. I thought that was all we needed . . . Nastassja trying to speak with a Texan drawl would fill cans upon cans of wasted footage. She didn't say anything, but the day before we were due to film that scene she spent the whole time with Harry Dean practising over and over again. When she came to the set she quietly asked if she could just do the first take with an accent. I agreed simply to humour her... And there it was, pretty perfect. The mouths of the two Texan crew members fell open, and so did mine.

'In America the most sacred thing is the family. It is virtually untouchable as a cornerstone of society. But what is really important is the well-being of the individuals within the family or without. It seemed to me that Travis had a basic responsibility to Jane and Hunter on this level: they needed each other more than his desire to possess a family. His greatest responsibility was to free Jane to accept the child—he is the only one who can "save her", as it were. I think pretending they could get back together as a family is the biggest lie we could have told.'

The scene is also significant in marking another 'first' for Wenders. Hitherto his most memorable scenes and lines have been dialogue exchanges between male characters—Bruno Ganz and Dennis Hopper in The American Friend, for example. This is the first time he has felt able to sustain a strong dramatic conversation between two central characters of the opposite sex. But the cast as a whole is one of the great assets of the movie, and it's worth noting the casting of two small parts that give a measure of Wenders' own interests. One is John Lurie, who plays the pimp in the imaginary 'peepshow' and who stars in the other 'discovery' of Cannes this year, Stranger than Paradise. Wim was aware of John Lurie's ambition to become an actor, but knew him only as a good jazz musician in Jim Jarmusch's band. After *Paris, Texas* and *Stranger than Paradise*, John Lurie, given the right parts, could certainly become one of the major actors of his generation.

The other is Bernhard Wicki, who plays the doctor and who embodies so much past history of German émigrés to Hollywood, having worked with most of the great directors and actors in his dual role as film-maker and performer. The old and the new; the fascination with Hollywood and New York; the importance of music; professional versus instinctual acting. Wicki was also responsible for testing Wenders' directorial control: 'He knows precisely what a director is going to do, so he was keen to trick me because he wanted to be on the screen as long as possible. We would run through rehearsals very quickly; then when we came to shoot he would suddenly take his time, pause over the words and give the character more weight, as it were. It was quite fun.'

Wenders feels that Paris, Texas has helped him to come to terms with the varied experiences he has had in America: 'It's not exactly a question of exorcising the ghosts; America is something incredibly dear to me still. But especially working with Sam helped me to articulate my feelings in a way that it was impossible to do in, say, Hammett, where there was bound to be conflict between director and writers (there were four on Hammett). Looking back on The State of Things, I think I was able to resolve my love-hate relationship with narrative in that film. That was a film that pulled itself together by the scruff of the text. A little bit of fiction at the end saved it, for me.'



## The American Friend

## Ed Lachman, cameraman, talles to Gerald Peary



ntil recently, Ed Lachman has been cinematography's best kept secret, at least in his native America. In Europe, however, he has found champions. Lachman is the American link to the West German New Wave, having shot How Much Wood Would a Woodchuck Chuck, Huey's Sermon, La Soufrière and the American sequences of Stroszek for Werner Herzog; Lightning Over Water and a still to be edited documentary on Japan for Wim Wenders; and having collaborated as a co-director with the late Rainer Werner Fassbinder on a forthcoming Sternbergian curio, The Blue Train.

Lachman's European links are not only with the Germans. Jean-Luc Godard assigned him to shoot blueprint sketches for *Passion*. He was co-director of photography on the American sequences of Bertolucci's *La Luna*, sharing the shooting with Vittorio Storaro, and he photographed two Hollywood films, *King of the Gypsies* and *Hurricane*, with Sven Nykvist. Also, Lachman was director of photography for *Little Wars*, the controversial Lebanese feature—still without a distributor in the USA or Britain—made by Maroun Baghdadi on the streets of West Beirut.

In the last several years, independent American directors have finally caught up with Ed Lachman, now 37, and on some days in his New York loft the telephone seems to ring off the hook with interesting job offers. Lachman has been lured by George T. Nierenberg to photograph Say Amen, Somebody, by Shirley Clarke to shoot a documentary about Ornette Coleman in Texas, and by Boston's Jan Egleson to photograph a new independent feature, Little Sister, starring John Savage. Also, there's a documentary on models, and another on strippers.

The globehopping Ed Lachman manages to land about two months a

year in New York and tor much of that time his loft is invaded by guests in residence from the international film world. West German crews are forever sleeping there, and it was the location for the hospital scenes from *Lightning Over Water*. Lachman's cat, Spook, wandered into some of the shots next to Nicholas Ray's bed.

Although chiefly known as a cameraman, Lachman himself is more pleased with his other achievements. His screenplay *Chausse-Trappes*, co-authored with Elieba Levine, was done 'Photo-Roman' style, with hundreds of stills in lieu of an actual movie, a form 'somewhere between the cinema and literature'. It was

published by Editions de Minuit of Paris, with a preface by Alain Robbe-Grillet. Secondly, his first film as a director, Report from Hollywood, was shot in Los Angeles following Wim Wenders shooting The State of Things—a movie of a movie of a movie.

Ed Lachman spent a year at Harvard in 1965, then dropped out for commercial film production in New York. He finished college at Ohio University. Borrowing the athletic department's Eclair and Nagra, he helped form a school film unit and make a \$60,000 feature, America First—'somewhere between Last Year at Marienbad and Alphaville'—which played at the Locarno Film

Festival. In his senior year, Lachman came back to New York and made the documentary The Family Affair, living four months with addicts at a therapeutic community, Odyssey House. He edited his 60,000 feet of film at the Maysles brothers', spending his nights under the Steenbeck. One morning, Al Maysles came in and found him there asleep. Impressed by his dedication, Maysles hired Lachman as a second cameraman. For three years, Lachman worked for the Maysles brothers, but he dreamed of the European cinema. His senior thesis was on Bertolucci's Before the Revolution, which, it is said, he watched admiringly 17 times.

## GERALD PEARY: How did you meet Bertolucci?

ED LACHMAN: I knew the stage manager of the New York Film Festival, and I would sneak into press screenings at Lincoln Center. After three or four years, everybody thought I belonged there. What I cherished most was contact with the film-makers. I really got to talk to Werner Herzog when he brought Signs of Life to the festival; I met Bertolucci when he brought The Spider's Stratagem and The Conformist. I walked into a press screening and we spoke through my broken French and his fluent French. I said, quoting Fabrizio in Before the Revolution, 'My shoes are from Parma, too.' Meaning that, like Fabrizio, I was from the middle classes, embedded in the bourgeoisie, even with my politically left ideals.

Bernardo looked at me as if I was crazy. How, 'he wondered, could this American identify with the Italian intellectual class? But I'd studied his poetry and, in my naiveté, I spoke to him through all the lines in his films. It was a very funny meeting, and he always calls me now 'My first American fan'. We didn't work together until *La Luna*.

## Before working with Herzog, you made a Hollywood film?

The Lords of Flatbush in 1973 was my first real break. I became the youngest director of photography in the New York local. I was 24. They had already shot about 70 per cent of the film with Perry King, Susan Blakely, Henry Winkler and Sylvester Stallone, but I ended up reshooting half the picture. Lords of Flatbush was a successful low-budget film, really low-budget. Easy Rider was shot for \$1,200,000, but Lords was shot for \$250,000 in 16mm and blown up. It grossed over \$20 million.

There are certain actors who have great presence in front of the camera, even if they are in a reaction shot. I always knew that Sylvester would be a star. Unfortunately, I thought he'd be a more serious star.

## How did you become involved with Herzog?

The first film was *How Much Wood Would a Woodchuck Chuck*. I worked as a co-director of photography with his regular cinematographer, Thomas



The Lords of Flatbush: Perry King, Sylvester Stallone (right).

Mauch. We shot in Amish country in Pennsylvania, this enclave of people at a cattle auction who speak a German dialect difficult even for Werner. Nothing like auctioneers exists in Germany. Werner was fascinated with how auction language became a song for capitalism, the poetry of materialism.

## But your real initiation into the obsessive world of Werner Herzog was making *La Soufrière* in 1976.

Werner called me at 6 a.m. from Germany, very excited. He'd read in the newspaper about a group of people who had insisted on remaining on the island of Guadeloupe in the Caribbean where a volcano, 'La Soufrière', was expected to erupt. There were predictions that the explosion would be the size of an atomic bomb. Werner said, so matter-of-fact, 'Would you make a film with me?' What could I say at 6 in the morning? I said, 'Of course. Where's Guadeloupe?' Werner said, 'Get a map out. Get to Pointe-à-Pitre. I'll meet you there.' He hung up. I got the plane fare together and arrived there a day and a half later, when everyone was evacuating the island. Werner arrived two days later

with the man who had assisted Mauch on a number of his films. The next day we got to the other side of the island, the site of the volcano. Werner told people we were on a suicide mission.

## Why did you have so much confidence in Herzog?

Werner once told me that if he said he'd be at a certain place on a certain street on a certain day in 1990, he'd be there. That's why I developed a trust. He's really the most normal person I know. He's also the most consistent.

Anyway, once we were there on Guadeloupe, it was like a science fiction film, all evacuated. Only the animals were there, and there was food still on tables. But we felt somehow strangely at peace. We were there three days looking for this one man who had refused to leave. We found him walking down a road with a can of water on his head. We said, 'Could we give you a ride home?' He said, 'Sure,' totally unfazed that we were there. The next day we came back and filmed him under a tree. He said, 'This is my home. I live here. I'll die here.'

Because I did La Soufrière, I got some kind of reputation for being willing to

take risks. Actually I'm a coward to agree to do some things, thinking them a test. I did *Little Wars*, in the Moslem section of Beirut, because I knew the project was important. But I was offered a film in which the producers would fly me and a soundman out to a boat of Cambodian refugees, and I'd stay on the boat for a week with these people. Then the helicopter would come back and pick me up. I turned the film down because I thought it was exploitative.

Would you call *La Soufrière* Herzog's *cinéma-vérité* film, because he didn't know the outcome—whether the volcano would erupt?

He hates cinéma-vérité. I was bitterly opposed to his ideas when we first met because I'd worked with the Maysles. I was a visual purist, a strict documentarist. The Maysles said, 'Filming reality was Truth.' Then they took a quantum leap to say it was objective truth. Well, everything is subjective. Werner says he'll lie to tell the truth. In La Soufrière, he mentions in voice-over how all the snakes crawled down to the sea and probably drowned themselves. Somebody once asked me about that. I laughed and answered, 'Werner saw that but I didn't.' Werner admits that he will take certain liberties if they reveal a greater truth. That's what makes him a contemporary documentarist.

I did camera on the American sequences of *Stroszek*, and it was shot like a documentary. Werner was primarily interested in getting a certain kind of performance from Bruno S. Although Bruno had lines, they were more or less improvised. And there were many non-actors and many times we didn't have locations marked down. We would put the actors into situations that everyone experienced for the first time. Stroszek was a true road movie. For instance, the scene in the diner: while we were having breakfast, we got permission to shoot there. We told everybody we'd pay for their breakfast. I used a handheld Arri BL. After we shot the sequence, someone asked what newspaper we were working for. They didn't even realise we were shooting a film.

## What kind of camera directions do you get from Herzog?

It's interesting to me that people are so taken by his images, because Werner never talks about an image as an image. He's always looking for interesting land-scapes, like the place he found in Cherokee, North Carolina, in *Stroszek*, with the dancing rabbits and chickens. But his reasons are never symbolic. He might say, 'There are some incredible dancing chickens there.'

Also, there are never cross-references to other films. What is strongest is the content of the images, not a formalistic attitude about what an image is. Things are much more intuitive and personal. He says, 'I hate sunsets,' and he'll never put one in his films because they're visual clichés. He'll never shoot coverage in the classic Hollywood way—close-up, medium, long shot. I said once, 'We don't have matching action, Werner.' He



Stroszek: Bruno S. wearing scarf and cowboy hat.

looked at me and said, 'What's matching action?'

## What is the star of *Kaspar Hauser* and *Stroszek*, Bruno S., really like?

He's like a wolf child. He was abused as a child and put in an institution for the mentally retarded. His mother was a prostitute, and he didn't talk until he was twelve. But now he works in a steel factory in West Berlin. He plays the piano. He paints. He has incredible talents but he started so late in life that he's stunted. For Stroszek, I picked him up at the airport and he was totally astonished by New York City. He would always sleep by the door so he could be ready and warn others of imminent danger. He literally lived in the clothes he had on the whole time of shooting. He didn't eat from his plate in the hotel. He was very embarrassed by his table manners. The first week he'd only eat from my plate what I'd ordered for myself.

I saw *Stroszek* sitting with him at the Berlin Film Festival. He smiled a few times watching but there was no overt emotion. Afterwards, he asked if he could have a poster. There was a picture of him with a scarf and a cowboy hat. After the screening, I said I'd like to take him for a beer. If you are a friend, he'll always take your hand and walk with you. He took me to a supermarket and we bought four beers. Instead of inviting me to his house, Bruno sat down on the stoop outside and we had our beers there. Then he said, 'Goodbye.'

## How did you start working with Wim Wenders?

I had seen *Alice in the Cities* at the New Films/New Directors series at MOMA and

Lightning Over Water: Wim Wenders, Ronee Blakely.



was taken by it. I met Wim in Paris, and he told me he'd be coming to New York to shoot part of *The American Friend*. Would I be able to help out? The first problem in New York was to find Dennis Hopper, who had disappeared. That took over two weeks. The other problem was the endless search for locations, the relationship between the artist's loft and the West Side Highway.

Wim is most alive when he's searching out locations and collecting images. For Wim, the image comes before the performances, and light and landscape are actors. And he's aware of his notations about the cinema. In contrast, Werner's images are immediate, spontaneous, and the lighting is functional. Werner gives you as little time with the camera as possible, forcing you to quick decisions.

## What did you do on The American Friend?

On the New York scenes, I assisted the cinematographer Robby Müller. I also learned finally about the American cinema, through what the Europeans said about it. And I relived the New Wave, being on the set with auteur directors Sam Fuller and Nicholas Ray. Sam was so full of life, smoking those gargantuan cigars and talking about his next three or four projects. Nick drank coffee, smoked cigarettes, and talked about how he would try to finish his last project.

Several years later, you were the cinematographer on *Lightning Over Water*. How did that film happen?

I got a call from Wim that he was coming to New York during a script rewrite of Hammett. Nick Ray was becoming ill and he wanted to visit and possibly do a project with him. Then I got a call from Nick to come over and talk about his ideas for a film. Wim wanted it to be a film that was Nick's. But as Nick became sicker, it became more and more a collaborative effort. It would be the story of the painter Nick played in American Friend trying to regain his dignity. That's what Nick wanted: the painter had a terminal illness which he was trying to cure. But Wim said, 'Why play a painter? Why not play a film-maker? It would be an experiment in the Godardian premise of truth in fiction, fiction in truth. The documentary as the starting point for fiction.

## Some critics felt that Lightning Over Water exploited Nicholas Ray's death from cancer...

We didn't know that Nick would get that sick during shooting, that the film would become like the Cocteau line in *Orphée*, 'All cinema is just the record of our own death.' But if you know Nick's work, he just lived out what he expected of every actor, that he give something of himself. *Lightning Over Water* was a chance for Nick Ray to make another film, and he wanted to make it as much as anybody.

## How did you photograph the film?

The colour starts out warm. As it progresses, it gets cooler and cooler. In the hospital scene, it's as blue as it could get, and cold, as we pictured death. But the

film starts out very dark and gets lighter and lighter, because we were all trying to come to some sort of enlightenment.

Finally, you worked with Fassbinder . . . I was invited to Munich in 1977 to do a short film from a Mishima short story, to be directed by a German poet named Wolf Wandratschek. We spent a month going to every setting and working with the actors, many of whom were from Fassbinder's stock company, including Kurt Raab, Udo Kier, and Fassbinder's wife Ingrid Caven. Some saw the film as a chance to break away from Rainer's tight hold. There was all this melodrama. They'd get drunk and say, 'We're going to do a film without Rainer!'

The night before we were going to shoot, Wolf stood in front of us and said, 'It is as important *not* to make a film as it is to make a film. I choose not to make a film.' He realised, as a poet, that there were so many factors in movie-making that he backed out. We were all dumbfounded. Udo Kier had come from Hungary. I'd come from New York. With Wolf's condolences, we decided to make a film ourselves. Udo said he had money coming to him from Fassbinder that we could use. But what would the film be about?

Udo said, 'Really to play a woman, not a man in drag, would be the ultimate role for me. The ultimate woman would be Marlene Dietrich.' Udo would play two parts in The Blue Train: Dietrich, and an American soldier leaving Germany on a train just as Dietrich was fleeing the Nazis. The story had no basis in fact. But who would write the script? Kurt Raab volunteered and also to play the train conductor. We met at a Mid-Eastern restaurant in Munich where all Fassbinder's crowd hung out, and Raab came back with the script. Udo's part, playing Dietrich and the soldier, became smaller than that of Raab playing the conductor. The train conductor was now in the Resistance and secretly in love with Dietrich. He had all these flashbacks with Dietrich. In the end, the conductor hangs himself.

Udo found all this totally unacceptable. There was a big fight in the restaurant and, in his frustration, Udo called up Fassbinder. So Rainer came right over to the restaurant. He came into the washroom while I was washing my hands and said, 'Who do you think you are to shoot in black and white? It took Stroheim ten years to shoot in black and white. He had to use thirty or forty filters per film.' He said, 'I'll give you my best idea for dialogue. There's a book with no copyright that has the most beautiful language ever written.' 'What would that be?' 'The Bible.' He said, 'I'll finance the film. You'll shoot, and Udo will act in it. I'll help with the script and we'll all co-direct.'

We used the Book of Revelation, which is like the end of the world, perfect for Germany in the war. We got one train car from a train company, and I shot it like Shanghai Express. Udo was going to cut The Blue Train but he did Alexanderplatz. Rainer wanted to do the

voice of Marlene Dietrich, but he died before he could. I talked to the editor of Fassbinder's last eight pictures, Juliane Lorenz. She has cut the film. She and Udo are finishing it at last, and *The Blue Train* will be a completed film.

Would you talk about the cinematography for *Union City*, which is surely your most Fassbinder-like film?

Union City is a film noir, but it's also about melodrama. The characters don't necessarily represent reality but perhaps some truth about reality, in a Brechtian sense. It may be presumptuous to compare Union City with Fassbinder's work, but the sets were totally stylised, and also the camera movements. I thought of Sirk too, Written on the Wind, one of Rainer's favourite films.

Mark Reichert, who directed, was a painter with an expressionist attitude about how he wanted to tell his 1950s paranoiac middle-class story. We decided to tell it formalistically: I wanted the light of black and white films of the 1940s but colours the way abstract expressionists used them—to evoke certain emotions and psychological states. We thought about Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, Adolph Gottlieb.

I experimented with colours that would fight each other. For instance, the bedroom where we put the corpse was a shade of salmon pink, but the outer room was lime green. Eyes can never focus those two colours. There must be a jump, like the way Op Art works. In addition, there was a pulsating neon light against the green outer room. I also worked with gels in extreme situations. I used the same hue of the gels as the colours of the sets, so you almost had the feeling that the colour of the walls became the colour of the people.

For two films in 1978, you worked as a cameraman with Sven Nykvist.

He was an idol for me. Whenever we had a free moment on King of the Gypsies, I'd ask him questions like, 'In The Passion of Anna's last shot, where the car becomes grainier and grainier, had Bergman scripted that or was it done in the editing room?' Sven had the most keen recollection of every shot. He told me that when he worked in the us on Pretty Baby, the crew thought he was German. They didn't know anything about him, even that he was Swedish. When it was time to leave to do Hurricane, Sven asked if I'd like to be the camera operator. So I spent nine months in Bora-Bora, and people thought I would be there for ever.

I kept a diary of my two films with Sven. One day I showed him the diagrams and charts of his lighting set-ups. He said, 'My God, if I knew it was that difficult, I would never have done it.' Sven is incredibly serene, and he feels he has no secrets. He lights, as the French say, 'by his nose'. He barely uses a light meter. He has an intuitive sense of where his exposure is on his negative because he has been doing it so long. And he'll use the least to create the most. He will always try to use two lights instead of three lights.

## Could you compare Nykvist's shooting with Storaro's, whom you observed on La Luna?

Vittorio uses big lights, arcs, even in low-light situations. He'll use big lights from a distance, let's say though a piece of muslin. He has created a lighting look which is uniquely his trademark and signature, with a chiaroscuro feeling to it. I always had my meter on the set to check out Vittorio's exposures: he stretches both extremes of the negative, from the strongest highlights to the deepest shadows. He loses his midrange, while Sven utilises the midrange of the negative. At least, that's my interpretation.

## How does Bertolucci work?

Bernardo will do maybe one shot in the morning, one in the afternoon, but each shot will encompass the whole sequence. He actually gets on the camera and operates the shot until he gets it where the scene is playing. Then Vittorio takes over. Bernardo blocks the actors to the shot, and the camera becomes another performer. In contrast, Werner Herzog blocks the camera to the action. And Wenders works more in tableaux. He is most concerned with lighting and composition—the frame is as important as the performers.

## Finally, among European directors, you worked with Godard, planning Passion...

One Sunday in 1981, I answered the phone. A foreign voice said, 'I'm Jean-Luc Godard. I'm in New York for a few days. Could we meet and talk at my hotel in Central Park South?' We talked for a long time at his hotel. He told me he was interested in doing a project here, and he wanted the freedom to hire someone for eight to twelve months. That didn't mean we would shoot that amount of time. Maybe we'd hang out together. Maybe we'd see a film. Maybe we'd go to lunch. Maybe we'd experience a location. He felt that a problem in films is that we always relate to our technical apparatus rather than to human beings. He was interested to know if I'd be willing to be with him without the camera.

## What did Godard think of your cinematography?

He'd liked my work on Lightning Over Water, and he said he was trying to use light in a similar fashion for Every Man for Himself. However, in many ways Godard felt that all cinematographers came between him and his films. They were protective about their images and unwilling to take risks. He said, 'The problem with cameramen is their great salaries and egos, but really they have nothing to do. Kodak does 80 per cent of the work. The lab does 5 per cent, and that leaves the cinematographer with 5 per cent of the work.'

When we did the *Passion* script, he discussed with Storaro and Renato Berta, a Swiss cameraman he works with, the possibility that we'd all shoot different segments of it. Possibly cine-

matographers should be like actors: different scenes shot by different cinematographers.

## So what did you and Godard actually shoot?

We worked on the *One from the Heart* set at Zoetrope. We did a kind of 'anatomy of a shot'. We would pick out different individuals, maybe an extra, maybe Vittorio Storaro. For the length of the shot that would actually be recorded on *One from the Heart*, we would isolate our individual within our shot.

We shot visual notes in 35, 16, Super-8, and later Godard did visual notations on tape. He wanted to use images the way an artist uses sketches, as an experimental stage. Why should film-makers rely on the written words of scripts? Godard might say, 'In this sequence, always keep the subject in the middle of the frame and don't worry about the edges.' In other words, don't try to compose the image. It was very interesting, because such a conceptual idea creates its own aesthetic.

Occasionally, Jean-Luc would say, 'Why don't you just shoot what you want today? I have to be in the office. I have to make some phone calls.' He'd test me like that, trying to give the impression that he had no idea what he wanted so I'd contribute. At first I tried to do things in a Godardian way. Later on I got confidence to shoot things I was interested in. He was open to such things. I'd tell him what I shot. He'd say, 'Fine.'

## After all this, you didn't shoot Passion? No, when Passion finally got made, I was doing Little Wars with Maroun Baghdadi in Beirut. Maroun had seen Lightning Over Water in Paris, and he was very moved. He wrote to me asking if I'd come to Beirut and see the light, and also talk about a project. He was a Christian living by choice in West Beirut, the Moslem sector.

We met in West Beirut and I was immediately taken into his home. For a month, I was shown around West Beirut, and everybody was very protective of me. When I heard guns going off at

night, they'd tell me people were getting married. Little Wars, which I shot with Mitch Dubin, my regular assistant cameraman, and a West German crew, takes place in 1975-76. We used mostly non-actors for this fiction film about Maroun's generation, who had aspirations for changing Lebanese society. But right, left, Moslem, Christian, they've been sold out by pure opportunists-a lost generation. We lived and shot solely in West Beirut, and we had dispensations from Druze, Syrian and Palestinian factions to shoot. Maroun is known as a journalist there, respected by all sides. I went back to Beirut in 1982 while shooting a documentary about Mother Teresa, in the last two weeks before a temporary armistice. This time I was in East Beirut, the Christian section, but we needed to get to West Beirut because Mother Teresa was bringing out Palestinian children from a mental hospital bombed four times by the Israelis. The Israelis, however, weren't even letting press and Red Cross back and forth. Through a photographer, I got smuggled into West Beirut and met many of my friends from shooting Little Wars. It was very strange to be experiencing the actual war we had created in a narrative film. It was strange that I, a Jew, was with the Palestinians.

## Had Maroun Baghdadi known of your religion when he hired you?

When he came here to show *Little Wars* at the 1982 New York Film Festival, I told him and asked if he'd known. He said it never made a difference to him. He didn't know why I felt it should make a difference. Maroun was right. It's not to say that I support the PLO's terrorist activities, but I came to realise in West Beirut that being anti-Zionist is not the same as being anti-Jewish.

## And what about Mother Teresa?

I've been filming Mother Teresa for several years now, around the world, from Guatemala to Lebanon to India. She's the real thing. I guess you could call me a Jew for Mother Teresa!

Little Wars.





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# TRUTH TONY RAYNS visits Paul Schrader in Japan, on location with Mishima OFFICTION

If Mishima hadn't lived, I would have created him. The fact that he did live gives the story greater resonance and power. But it's truth that has all the power of fiction. It's one of those rare stories that allows you to stay close to the truth and yet exercise the power of fiction over the imagination. I came to Mishima because his story is part of my fantasy world, just as he came to the boy who burned down the Golden Temple because he was part of his fantasy world.

If I'm going to do a film about my own death-wishes, my own homo-erotic, narcissistic feelings, my own over-calculation of life and my own inability to *feel*, well, here's a man who has repeatedly stated those identical problems. I believe that this is the only

way to do a biography which also has the force of a personal statement: two psyches have to be in sufficient synch to give you the liberty you need within the confines of what actually happened. And, compressing forty-five years into two hours, I have to find a statement strong enough to equal any that I could have made through fiction—and possibly to surpass it.'

Paul Schrader was talking late at night in a bar in Tokyo. It had been a 6 a.m. call that day, but his tiredness belied the fact that he was not very well: like all the other gaijin on the project he was fighting off a thick, bronchial flu, to which the Japanese seemed immune. He was halfway through shooting Mishima, and he had reached one of the hardest

parts of his own script: the climactic events of 25 November 1970, when Mishima and four cadets from his private 'defence force' raided the Jieitai headquarters in Tokyo and tried to incite the assembled troops to rebellion. He had shot the exteriors a week before, with three hundred extras, a helicopter, police cars and the whole works, in a northern town called Koriyama. Now he was locked into the interiors, filming Mishima's intense final minutes in a claustrophobically accurate studio replica of General Mashita's office at Ichigaya. The next day or so would see him through with the strictly biographical side of the film, but he faced six more weeks of filming, working with entirely different actors and a different



Mishima: stylised set by Eiko for a fictional sequence

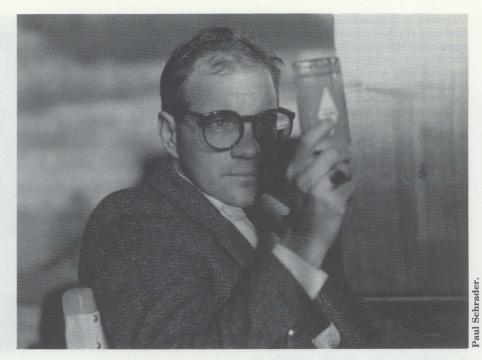
designer on scenes from three of Mishima's novels.

Anyone who didn't know Schrader or his circumstances that day might have taken his fluent rationale for the project as so much practised PR. (The fluency is indeed his; I've transcribed what he said verbatim.) But that kind of lucidity is Schrader's norm, whether he's tired and sick or not, and he has never struck me as being glib. It's easy to believe that he has, as he says, 'lived with these ideas for ten years.'

Schrader first mentioned his interest in Mishima to me several years ago in London. He knew I had a special interest in Japanese movies, and casually asked if I knew where to lay hands on a copy of Mishima's film The Rite of Love and Death (Yukoku, made in 1965). This is a 28-minute adaptation of Mishima's own short story Patriotism, about the ritual suicides of a young army officer and his wife the morning after the attempted coup d'état of February 1936. Mishima produced, directed and starred in it, a typically flamboyant gesture in a life carefully balanced between observance of Japan's strict social proprieties and acts of outrageous individualism. It was filmed on a bare set, not unlike a Noh stage, and the only sound was the 'Liebestod' from Tristan und Isolde.

The problem about seeing it is that the film has 'vanished' since Mishima's death; his widow Yoko has destroyed the negative and burned every print she could trace. Apparently she feels that the film was too obviously a rehearsal for Mishima's actual suicide, and the suicide is one of the (many) parts of her late husband's life that Yoko would prefer to strike from the record. Schrader never did get to see The Rite of Love and Death (although at least one print does still exist), but that turned out to be the least of his problems with a woman determined not to be remembered as the hapless wife of a self-destructive gay fanatic . . . not to mention a woman with influential connections on the political Right.

Mishima bequeathed the rights to Confessions of a Mask and two other novels to his mother, to provide her with an annuity, but everything else in his estate went to Yoko. This was a very proper course of action, but it could be argued that it was also the only serious miscalculation that Mishima ever made. One of the letters Mishima wrote on the last night of his life, explaining his wishes to his family, read in part: 'I have thrown the pen away. Since I die not as a literary man but entirely as a military man I would like the Chinese character for "sword" (bu) to appear in my Buddhist name. The character for "pen" (bun) need not appear.' Clearly he did not foresee that his widow would devote all her substantial energies to enshrining his memory as that of a great writer, nor that she would actively try to erase all trace of his homosexuality, his 'militarist' fantasies, his body-building, his publicly expressed death-wishes and his delight in shocking Japanese orthodoxies. Perhaps he did not foresee either



that the manner of his death would allow him to be co-opted as a figurehead by the Right, and that this would give his widow a special status in certain circles. Hiraoka Yoko exercises iron control over Mishima's estate; anyone who wants to do anything connected with Mishima must have her explicit approval.

Paul Schrader's interest in Mishima is virtually the direct opposite of Yoko's. For Schrader, what counts is precisely that Mishima refused the role of 'great writer' and the aura of intellectual prestige that went with it. That Mishima was determined to translate himself from a 'man of letters' into a 'man of action', that he was a man who taught himself to despise his own emotions and who felt 'real' only when he was pursuing physical sensations. And that he was a fantasist who willed his own fantasies into being and pushed them to their absolute limit . . .

Why, then, did Hiraoka Yoko agree to let Schrader make his film? Even Schrader himself can only speculate, although there are certain objective factors that must have had a bearing on her decision. One is that sales of Mishima's books have plummeted in Japan in the last decade, while remaining comparatively buoyant in the West. Another is that no Japanese has come forward to tackle Mishima (and thereby give him the renewed prominence that this film undoubtedly will): there is still no reasoned biography of Mishima in Japanese, while there are two in English. There is one precedent for Yoko's assent to the Schrader film: her unexpected co-operation in 1971 with John Nathan, Mishima's best biographer and his sometime translator. The irony is that initiatives to deal with Mishima are likely to come only from non-Japanese. As Schrader points out, 'There is still great queasiness about Mishima in Japan. This is a consensus culture, and the problem is that there's no consensus on Mishima.' This

perception is backed up not only by Mishima's present low profile in the Japanese consciousness but also by the perceptible nervousness with which the Japanese have received Schrader's project: hardly anything has appeared in the Japanese press about the shooting of the film, despite the involvement of several major stars, and neither of the two Japanese investors (Towa Distributors and Fuji Television) has publicly admitted its participation.

The first approach to the widow was made by Schrader's elder brother Leonard, who has a Japanese wife, speaks Japanese and co-authored the screenplay. It was, he recalls, one of the hardest phone calls he has ever had to make. Her initial response was a flat rejection; this later mellowed into guarded interest, as the American side persisted and made a number of promises and concessions. The main concession was Schrader's undertaking to avoid 'controversial' areas, like Mishima's homosexuality and politics. Since he anyway planned to use scenes from Mishima's fiction as a means of exploring the darker areas of the writer's life, Schrader saw this as a comparatively minor concession, but he soon realised that Yoko would insist that the more 'difficult' books, too, should remain out of bounds. No Forbidden Colours, for example. A formal contract was finally agreed and signed, giving Schrader the right to dramatise scenes from three novels: The Temple of the Golden Pavilion (1956), the untranslated Kyoko's House (1959) and Runaway Horses (1968). (Until shortly before shooting began, Schrader also planned to use sequences from Mishima's final novel, The Decay of the Angel, but dropped the idea.) Clauses in the contract included a stipulation that no character representing Yoko herself would appear in the film's biographical sections

About two weeks into production, Yoko changed her mind. She gave an interview to a prominent magazine (the first time she had formally spoken to the press since Mishima's death) denouncing the film for going too far and alleging that Schrader was breaking his promise to avoid themes like homosexuality and politics. The withdrawal of her blessing from the project made no difference to anything contractually, but it may have helped to guarantee that the film would get no official co-operation from the authorities. However, it is quite usual for the Japanese authorities to withhold location facilities and other services from film-makers, and anyway, according to Schrader, most of the necessary permissions had been 'negotiated' before filming began with the aid of unmarked envelopes full of used banknotes. Some Japanese traditions are evidently not dead yet.

The Schrader brothers' script for Mishima is a remarkable achievement. No aspect of it recalls the banalities or naivetés of the Hollywood 'bio-pic' tradition, least of all the fact that it is written to be played entirely in Japanese. It is divided into four numbered chapters, corresponding with the different phases in the evolution of Mishima's obsessions. The first three chapters compare Mishima at different ages with protagonists from his novels: Mizoguchi, the ugly, stuttering monk who burns down the Golden Pavilion because he so hates and resents the perfection of its beauty; Osamu, the actor in Kyoko's House who progresses from narcissism to an exquisite masochism when he 'sells' his body to an older woman; and Isao, the fanatically nationalist student in Runaway Horses who wants to lead a group of like-minded young men in a suicide attack on the Bank of Japan. The fourth chapter synthesises the preceding three, showing Mishima increasingly in control of his own destiny as he moves towards the point where art and action converge: the moment when he finally feels alive, the moment when he accomplishes the death he has longed for all his life.

Cutting across this structure, though, is another. Three strands run through the entire film. The first is the film's present: 25 November 1970, Mishima's last day, filmed as much like newsreel as possible, with bleached colours, much hand-held camerawork and fast cutting. The second is scenes from Mishima's past, more soberly filmed and shown in black and white. The third is the scenes from the novels, sumptuously filmed in saturated colours on highly stylised sets. (Schrader originally intended to shoot the fiction scenes on video, to differentiate them even further from the rest of the film, but dropped the plan when he saw the quality of video-to-film transfers.) These three strands are intercut in all four chapters, following a logic that has everything to do with theme but very little to do with chronology or narrative as such. The script is full of brilliant transitions. The five-year-old Mishima watches the forty-five-year-old Mishima leave the house on the morning of 25 November. The twelve-year-old



Mishima musters the courage to talk to a 'severely beautiful' classmate, and turns into the stuttering Mizoguchi. A 1930s policeman tells the captive Isao that there's no need to torture him because he *wants* to talk . . . and the film cuts to the forty-three-year-old Mishima nervously entering Tokyo University for a debate with an excited mob of student radicals.

Mishima has been shot by Schrader's regular cinematographer John Bailey (they did American Gigolo and Cat People together), but the team also includes two notable first-timers. For design, Schrader has broken with Fernando Scarfiotti but stayed in the world of high-fashion: the film's fiction scenes were designed by Ishioka Eiko, who had never worked on a film before. Her Eiko by Eiko is probably the bestselling high-fashion book of the 1980s; her hyper-stylised designs for Mishima are absolutely extraordinary. (By contrast, the film's biographical scenes are designed by Takenaka Kazuo, a Toho veteran who worked on most of Naruse's later films.) And the music is being written by Philip Glass; it will be his first score for a non-documentary film.

Mishima himself is played for most of the film by Ogata Ken, best known in the West for his roles in Imamura films-Vengeance Is Mine, Eijanaika and The Ballad of Narayama. He bears no physical resemblance to Mishima, but is widely recognised in Japan as the most technically skilled actor of his generation. He told me he feels that this is the role for which he will be remembered; judging by the shooting and rushes I saw, he may well be right. Three child actors play Mishima from infancy to adolescence in the film's first chapter; Ogata's role spans the last twenty years of Mishima's life. The actors in the fiction scenes-Sawada Kenji, Nagashima Toshiyuki, Hidari Sachiko-are stars in Japan but sadly little known in the West.

The Number 4 Stage at Toho Studios in Setagava-ku, a suburb in the south of Tokyo, offers much the same prospect of controlled chaos as every other studiostage in the world, except that there are 150 pairs of shoes just inside the door. Schrader is working with an almost wholly Japanese crew. Most of them speak little or no English, but Schrader has a team of four fully bilingual people at hand constantly, to interpret his directions and to advise him on the quality of the performance in a particular take. (They include Chieko Schrader, Leonard's wife, and the American Alan Poul, the film's associate producer.) Today they are filming the scene of carnage in General Mashita's office at Ichigaya: Mishima and four cadets from his Shield Society have barricaded themselves in and are using antique samurai swords to fight off the soldiers who are trying to break in from the next room. It is suffocatingly hot, and the hysterical intensity of the scene is getting to everybody. Schrader is shooting a lot of covering material, and so the actors are having to go through their lines and moves again and

I think back to a week ago, when I watched the exteriors for this scene being shot on location in Koriyama. Ogata went through Mishima's tirade to the Jieitai troops so often, struggling to make himself heard above the jeers of the men below and the noise of the helicopter overhead, that he finally forgot his lines. But, professional that he is, he ranted on: 'I don't know what the hell I'm saying any more . . .' He got a warm round of applause from the whole crew. But nobody's laughing any more in the studio. Schrader told me later that when they shot Mishima's final moments in the Ichigaya office, people broke down on set

The *Mishima* team gracefully declined Toho's offer of offices in the studio admin building, and instead set up their own pre-fab workshop/office complex next to





ing, because Takenaka had to show Eiko the ropes.'

Stage 4. Schrader's own room is crowded with Mishima-bilia: everything from videotapes of the gangster and thriller movies in which Mishima acted to picture books by the gay photographer Yato Tamotsu, to which Mishima contributed prefaces (and for which he posed). During a meal-break (mountains of rice-boxes were delivered, provoking universal joy), I retreated there with Schrader and got answers to some of the basic questions about the project.

Were the fiction scenes an integral part of the film from the first conception?

'They came into it for two reasons. One is that conventional "bio-pics" are very limiting. No one's life is quite as vivid as their fantasies, and that's particularly true of an artist. Mishima was first of all a fantasist, and it's necessary to go into those fantasies in order to realise their potency in his own life. In other words, I felt that the conventional biographical format couldn't do the job.

'The other reason is a more pragmatic one. The powers-that-be, meaning the widow, the literary executor, the Japanese financiers and distributors and the Japanese right-wing, would not allow me to broach certain aspects of Mishima's life. The only way I could get into them was through the books. And so the decision to use sequences from the books was a compromise, but a compromise made in heaven (or wherever the Japanese make such compromises). And, as I said, I wouldn't have wanted to do the life alone anyway. If you show Mishima buggering someone in a Shinjuku hotel, despite its "controversial" nature, it's just not a very interesting scene. But if you explore the foetid, overheated atmosphere of sexuality in the novels, you can realise much more. It's much richer than anything you could get from a sordid, real-life

How did you arrive at the three different strands of narrative?

episode. If you think that's speculation,

just look at Nijinski . . .

'Again, several reasons. The first was that I knew I'd be working in a foreign language, and I didn't want to put myself in the position of being at the mercy of a performance in a language I didn't understand. Therefore I had to devise a structure that would transcend any one actor. I had to become a chessplayer and create a board of characters that I could manipulate, to protect myself against the cultural and linguistic gulf. That was a very strong motivation: protecting my ass!

'Another reason is that one of my strengths (and I have this in common with Mishima) is enormous calculation, and the ability to see a pattern. Even as a child, I could race through jigsaw puzzles, and I'm still good at that sort of mind-hand co-ordination. So I knew this was something I could handle. Mishima himself boasted how he controlled everything. In fact, the most valid criticism of his work is perhaps that it's too controlled, that it lacks spontaneity. So if I make the film in this calculating manner, I'm not only being true to myself but also true to my subject. It's the right format for us to be in synch.'

What thought went into the decisions about design?

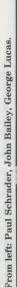
'The most visually exciting of the three strands is the one that was originally to be done on video. When I dropped that, because the video simply looked too ugly, I had to find something else to set against the film's more realistic elements, and I decided on highconcept design. And thinking about conceptual design brought me to Eiko, whose experience is in that area exclusively. She has never done a film before, only department store windows, posters and TV commercials. And so she did the fiction designs, and a designer from the film industry did the others. Fortunately, there's no overlap. When you see Eiko's sets, there's nothing of Takenaka in them, and there's nothing of her in his sets either. That's particularly gratifyAnd what considerations did you have when you were casting Mishima?

'I spent months looking for a Mishima hero, a truly androgynous star. I tested a number of people and found a couple from outside the profession who looked fabulous, but they didn't have the technical skills to handle the part. With all my other difficulties, I didn't have the time (much less the ability) to teach somebody how to act. One of the problems on this film, beyond the linguistic and cultural ones, is that Mishima himself is not that sympathetic: I need a trained and able actor who can reach out across the gulf of Mishima's life and gain the audience's sympathy. None of the lookalikes fitted that bill. So I had to choose: would I take a guy who looks like Mishima but doesn't command sympathy, or someone who doesn't fit the image but knows how to break your heart? Phrase the question like that, and there's only one answer.

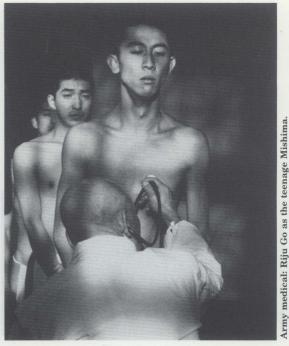
'When I first came to Ogata Ken, he was quite surprised himself. He thought that I was going to offer him some minor role, but he'd heard that I was having trouble casting the lead and so he was wondering whether I was in so much trouble that I'd ask him to do it. He is very highly regarded in Japan, but he's not in any sense a superstar. Earlier today he went out of his way to tell me (actually at the expense of shooting time, because the crew was waiting) that he was sort of proud about it when I was forced to come to him, but that now he realises, after the experiences of the last month and particularly of the last day, how much he was longing to come to me. He thought he was saving me, and found that I was saving him. . .

Aside from the difficulties with Mishima's widow, what were the main problems in setting the film up?

'There's been resistance to this film at all levels. Let's take the personal level.







I fervently hope that won't happen. The film will play in my cut throughout the world, and it is agreed that its premiere in Japan—at the Tokyo Film Festival next spring—will also be my version. We'll have to see what happens then.'

Later that evening, I watched a couple of hours of the rushes from Koriyama and a few short rough-cut sequences assembled to help Philip Glass with his work on the score. It all looked magnificent. It is rash to speculate about any film before it's finished, but it looks very much as if Schrader's riskiest undertaking will lift his work to an entirely new level. A fine irony for a man who worries that he over-calculates life.

Grateful thanks to Tom Luddy for making the writing of this article possible. Japanese names throughout are in their Japanese form: surname first, given name second.

No gaijin has previously made a film on a Japanese in Japanese, and the idea has naturally met with great resistance. As recently as a hundred years ago, the Japanese didn't believe that it was possible for a foreigner to learn their language. Still today, the phrase for a foreigner who understands Japanese is "henna gaijin" ("odd foreigner"). There is an inbred resistance to the idea that anyone else can understand them.

'Then, there's the political level. The fact that Nakasone Yasuhiro [current Prime Minister] was in charge of the Defence Ministry at the time of the Incident is something that has worked both for and against the film. [Nakasone was the person who authorised Mishima to train the members of his Shield Society at an actual Jieitai training camp, alongside the Jieitai themselves.] It means that there can be no government help with the film at any level whatsoever. On the other hand, it also means that there can be no overt government resistance, because that would only draw attention to it. The only thing there can be is covert government resistance, and that we can overcome.

"The other danger is the fringe Right. We've received death threats, but it seems that the mainstream Right exerts some kind of control over the fringe Right, although they deny that they're in any way responsible for what the fringe get up to. Of course, there's always the risk of one solitary crazy. But our Japanese producer Yamamoto has spent a lot of time and—off the record—money dealing with the mainstream Right, on the implicit understanding that they would somehow get the fringe Right to knuckle under.'

Can we mention that Fuji and Towa are co-producing the film?

Tm not at all sure what will become of this film in Japan. Fuji Television and Towa Distributors are the Japanese investors. They have put up \$2½ million, against the \$3¼ million that Francis Ford Coppola and George Lucas persuaded Warner Brothers to put up. At this time, the project is too sensitive for them to have their names associated with it. They have given us the money without any formal paperwork. If, when they see the film, they feel that they can go ahead and release it here, then a deal will be struck not unlike the deal that was struck before they gave the money in the first place. If they see the film and feel that they cannot release it, then they'll write it off. But at least they'll have been spared the grief of being associated with it for the year between parting with the money and seeing the film. I have no qualms about saying this, because it's one of those "known" secrets.

'My greater fear is that they'll cut the film into a parody of itself in order to protect their investment. They will have the right to do that if they want to.



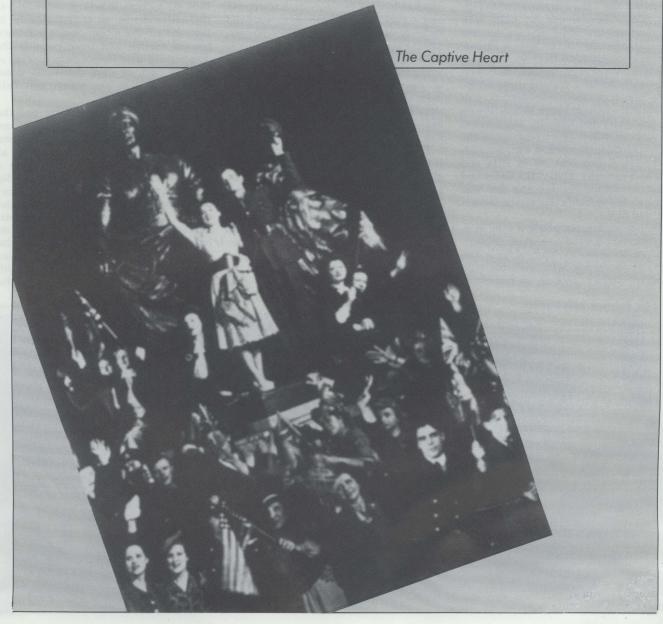
Ogata Ken

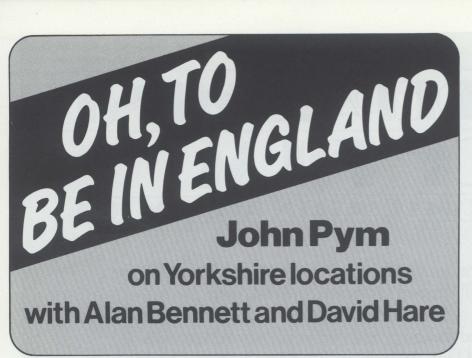
## THE DEPARTMENT OF FILM

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Alan Bennett and the Unlicensed Pig. A June night somewhere in Yorkshire. It is past the pig's bedtime. The pig's minder, Gerry Cott, explained to me earlier-before the trouble started-that the public has a fixed notion of what pigs look like. They should be pink with standing-up ears. Most pigs are not like this. However, for this picture, A Private Function (script Alan Bennett, direction Malcolm Mowbray), Intellectual Animals (UK) Ltd have trained three acceptable film pigs (the three Bettys), half Tamworth and half Large White. It's an unusual story for Bennett; the farcical elements snowball. Much depends on the pigs. Had Bennett worked with animals before? In A Day Out, set in 1911 and shot at Fountain's Abbey, the script had called for butterflies; but the day was cold and, to Bennett's regret, the butterflies had died.

We are strung out along a lane running through a wood on a steep hillside. This is a key moment. Michael Palin, the hero, a chiropodist who with his wife (Maggie Smith) is seeking acceptance in

a Yorkshire town, has kidnapped a pig, an unlicensed pig, being secretly fattened for a Coronation feast by the priggish guardians of the town's middleclass reputation. (Real doctors, as opposed to mere foot doctors, have power and status, can perform such essential tasks as despatching the elderly incontinent to homes in Bridlington.) The pig is on a choke chain snuffling among the wild garlic: this is 'Big Betty', the largest of the three and allegedly the most biddable; she cannot be compelled to go anywhere, but she may be lured with food-she has an insatiable appetite, like a shark.

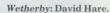
The owner of the car in which the pig is to be transported, a Wolseley Hornet, gleaming, plumply upholstered, is not present. But his father has come along: filming for those who have not watched it before is nothing if not romance and excitement. The road is blocked and night travellers, unable to continue their journeys, jostle good-humouredly with the crew. Children are lifted up. Two policemen, grateful not to be in

London battling the miners, survey the scene with studied unconcern. Episodes of *Grange Hill* were filmed on Ilkley Moor recently: this lot are clearly going to be no trouble.

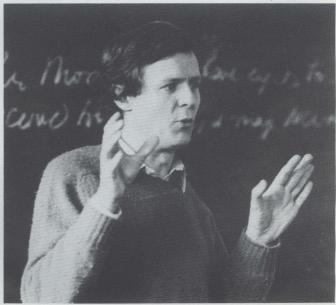
It's the simple actions which are always the tricky ones. The pig, which is to be led sliding down the bank by a stooped, furtive, voluminously mackintoshed Palin, must hop smartly into the back seat of the Wolseley. A boy-the script has him as 'Philip, a grotesque'must crash through the undergrowth. (Kitted out like Richmal Crompton's William, the young man stamps his nailed boots and smokes a cigarette with the electricians.) Palin must cower before making good his escape. The pig is in position. This is Malcolm Mowbray's first feature film, but having directed Bennett's Our Winnie with exemplary care for television, he and his writer are harmoniously at one. They concocted the script idea together: Bennett brought the chiropodist; Mowbray (though he's not volunteering this) the unlicensed pig-a family member, it is rumoured, kept one in the days of postwar rationing. Mowbray says that the story was also a means of pinning down some thoughts on the class system. Bennett reckons Mowbray well suited to the material and, more importantly, to the tone of the script. Stephen Frears, his old partner and more recently the director of David Hare's Saigon: Year of the Cat, had, he said, developed something of a taste for action and heli-

Down the bank come Palin and the pig, the former murmuring many an endearment into those standing-up ears. It works perfectly until they arrive at the car. Inside, Gerry Cott proffers a ginger biscuit, Big Betty's favourite. Big Betty, however, will not heed her master's voice. The shot is tried again, and again; time passes; Alan Bennett, anxious Alan Bennett, who is always on hand for the shooting of his scripts, the soul of affability and politeness, begins to show signs of agitation; Bill Paterson, the Brylcreemed villain, the

A Private Function: Alan Bennett.







functionary with the power to issue pig licences, Wormold by name, tries to buoy Alan's spirits with a forthright suggestion about how, if they had been in Glasgow, he personally would have got the pig to perform; time passes, determination stiffens.

This is a HandMade film: Palin and Maggie Smith agreed to star, and the company put up the money. Mark Shivas is the producer. Budgets are a company secret, but an educated whisper has it that this one is well under £2m. Palin usually likes to write his own scripts. But who would not jump, what selfrespecting comedian, and especially he of Ripping Yarns, would not give his right arm to star as a chiropodist in an Alan Bennett picture, and the writer's first 'film film' at that? (Why had it to be a film film? Mowbray was insistent: it would stand a chance of future life. Bennett was more cautious: the difference between this and his TV scripts was that he'd invested a great deal more time than usual.) Palin, full of enthusiasm, had visited a chiropodist, learned about verrucas and the common fear among many people of having their feet held-'You must catch hold with confidence.' Now here he is, at night, in the cold, in the mud, with the pig. On another occasion the script required him to minister to this same pig's trotter. Ingratitude, thy name is pork!

More than ginger biscuits, the pig likes sardine oil. Sardine oil is applied to the Wolseley's far side back window: the pig-the 'mad pig' as Bennett now calls her—has to get into the car to reach the smeared delicacy. (It must be said, however, that up to now, and this is the last day but one of shooting in Yorkshire, the three pigs have been well behaved, have stood on window sills, put their heads in gas ovens in search of apples, and that the cast has grown warily fond of them.) But Big Betty has now eaten enough food to feed a regiment and the sardine oil will not do the trick. Half in the car she comes to a dead halt. The camera rolls for take . . . one hardly dares note the number . . . and Palin ('the saintly Michael,' as Shivas calls him) applies desperate pressure to her hindquarters. Mowbray is past the point of panic. Alan Bennett is probing nervously at his wisdom teeth and chewing at his handkerchief. Bill Paterson-fresh from his role as Dickie Bird the DJ turned investigative reporter in Bill Forsyth's



The night, the pig, the car.

Comfort and Joy (but who can forget him as the chilling Archie Maclean in Hare's Licking Hitler?)—senses they are not going to get to his scene that evening. The crew have been working without complaint since the previous morning. Midnight tolls. Paterson suggests that 200 volts will shift the pig.

Denholm Elliott, who plays Dr Swaby, the town physician, he who hates the chiropodist most, celebrates with A Private Function (provisional title) his seventy-fifth film. He and Richard Griffiths are due to appear in the shot which will not be achieved. Elliott is wisely ensconced in his caravan: experience tells; best to wait for your call. The father of the owner of the Wolseley remarks to Shivas that he has seen the screenwriter and has informed him that if he had done the job he wouldn't have used a pig. He adds with native understatement, 'Ehh, he's no Ibsen, is he?' Shivas is sure that this will buck Alan up.

Next morning, high on Ilkley Moor, the saintly Palin shows no sign of the climax of last evening's shoot when Big Betty, who had eventually been lured into the car before the cameras rolled, finally lost patience and vaulted into the front seat. Her head emerged through the driver's window; Mowbray gallantly seized it in an arm lock; Palin suffered the attention of her trotters; the stillswoman, unable to watch, placed her hands over her ears. A perfect summer morning, high above civilisation: Palin had lived to tell the tale of his Lillian Gish moment on the ice floe. Shivas, despite the uncharacteristic setbacks, was in expansive mood: he had only once before worked with Palin; on a TV play, Secrets (since wiped by the BBC), of extreme impropriety about a strangely popular chocolate bar-the 'secret' was the addition of human remains.

One has the sense of film-making, in England now, on the crest of a wave. A Private Function, Shivas says, slipped under the capital allowance wire. Bennett, who recently celebrated his fiftieth birthday, is in perfect humour, stretched on the heather. He is something of a stickler: when Denholm Elliott, in an earlier scene, had added an extra word to one of his languidly cast-off lines, their author was in like a ferret to whisper the correction in Mowbray's ear. In his own person, however, Bennett's a spendthrift raconteur. He had an uncle whose ashes had been scattered up here on the moor; he could not bring himself to accompany his auntie for the actual scattering; he had remained by the car, a deeply embarrassing moment. His mother, he remembered, had spread greaseproof paper on the kitchen floor, because the urn, which had spent the night in their house, had seemed to her in some mysterious way unhygienic.

David Hare and the Privet Hedge. Animals again: but this is a 'film' farm, doubling for Yorkshire, near Rickmansworth in the trim, less precipitous Hertfordshire countryside. A cockerel owns the garden of the farmhouse production office: he has no part, major or minor, in David Hare's Wetherby. Simon Relph, the producer, and Patsy Pollock, his associate, address the handsome bird cordially-but the bird's indifference is no cause for anxiety. During lunch, a flock of freshly shorn sheep run harmlessly past the entrance to the barn dining hall. Pastoral harmony: elsewhere lorries are loading oversize polystyrene trees, refugees from Gary Kurtz's Disney production Oz.

First question: Why not Yorkshire Yorkshire? Wester Ross, the Black Isle, Norfolk, Nottingham and, in Bennett's new picture, Ilkley Moor and Barnoldswick-real locations which aren't the Home Counties-have been key ingredients, significantly different identifying marks, of recent British films. Money's the answer. The New British Cinema is not flush. Much of Wetherby is set inside a cottage: finding the right one, with the right outlook (and large enough for the crew's paraphernalia) was judged impractical; easier to build a four-walled, roofed, slightly larger than life cottage in a Herts field with panoramas visible through every window. Furthermore, a London-based crew could sleep in their own beds. The budget is a stripped-down £1m. And in any event, it seems, this is a sort of Yorkshire of the mind. There has been some location shooting, but this 'Wetherby' is not the Wetherby, but a bits and pieces mosaic.

It is David Hare's first film as his own director, though he has, of course, had 

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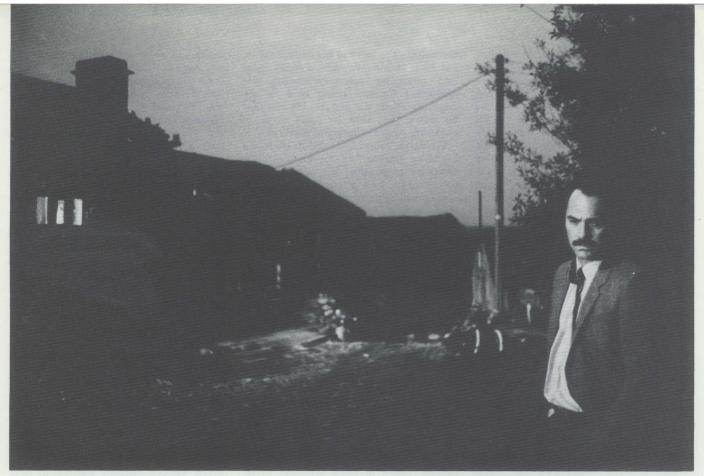


 $(Above)\,A\,Private\,Function: The chiropodist\,Gilbert\,Chilvers\,(Michael\,Palin)\,and\,his\,provident\,wife\,Joyce\,(Maggie\,Smith).$ 

 $\label{eq:continuity} \begin{tabular}{ll} \textbf{(Left) $A$ Private Function:} & \textbf{Mervyn} & \textbf{(David Morgan),} \\ \textbf{Joyce Chilvers} & \textbf{(Maggie Smith)} \\ \textbf{and Mother} & \textbf{(Liz Smith),} & \textbf{forever hungry.} \\ \end{tabular}$ 

 $\label{eq:continuity} \begin{tabular}{ll} (Below) $A$ $Private Function: Joyce (Maggie Smith) and the kidnapped pig. \\ Photographs by David Farrell. \\ \end{tabular}$ 





 $({\bf Above}) \ \textit{Wetherby} \hbox{:} \ {\bf The\ law\ (Stuart\ Wilson)}.$ 

(Right) Wetherby: Jean Travers (Vanessa Redgrave).

(Below) Wetherby: At dinner, Marcia Pilborough (Judi Dench). Photographs by Sophie Baker and Nobby Clark.





considerable experience—and not just within the establishment portals of the National, but in the rough provinces—as a theatre director. Shivas had been happy to leave me under a tree with the script of A Private Function. (Alan Bennett, in passing: 'It bears absolutely no relation to what's written there.') But everyone on Wetherby has taken a blood oath not to jabber about the job in hand. One sticks a rod in the ground and hopes to feel something. A farm? Echoes of Fanshen? Emphatically not, Hare says. This is something of a retreat from Saigon and A Map of the World. (He said somewhere years ago that he had never been interested in repeating himself.) 'Here's a quote: "This is my privet hedge movie".' Diligent poking reveals that we have a dinner party at the cottage. Vanessa Redgrave, Jean Travers, the partygiver, is entertaining a couple, Ian Holm and Judi Dench; a third guest mysteriously presents himself. To whom is he attached? There is a misunderstanding: the evening ends unexpectedly. Pinterland? We shall have to wait and see. One clue: Christopher Tucker, guru of special make-up effects, is in attendance on the day of my visit.

Simon Relph is more forthcoming. 'It's about a person struck by lightning twice.' It is, it turns out, the worst possible day to have paid a visit. This is the day—that mythical day—when something exciting is going to happen. ('If only you'd been here yesterday, then what sights you'd have seen . . .' is the customary greeting offered to eager journalists out for a day on location.) Now the cottage is off limits. Perhaps, after all, the aloof cockerel is to have his day. David Hare is determined to make amends. One cannot imagine him

recounting the story of his uncle's ashes, but he is in his own right a quick, easy and engaging conversationalist. He apologises for not being able to say anything about the picture. It's not that he won't, just that he can't think of anything sensible, today of all days.

We dance round the subject. He was a founding partner of Greenpoint, the company responsible for, among other co-ventures, The Ploughman's Lunch and Loose Connections, and had from the start been planning a film with them. Back to back with Wetherby-and the town of Wetherby, incidentally, houses a Northern arm of the British Library: Jean Travers' place of employment—he wrote another script, The Butter Mountain, also earmarked for Greenpoint, about the toils of a Euro MP. His star is in the ascendant: the landmarks in his publicity handout biography are now immutable, 'For the rest of my life people will say "He wrote three plays for Kate Nelligan". It's just not so.' Plentyone of those three plays, and dedicated to her-was rapturously received in the United States and is shortly to be filmed with Meryl Streep starring and Fred Schepisi directing

The assistant director urges Hare to eat up his lunch and come to view the rushes. There is some business to be transacted with Relph: badinage is all very well in its place; the pair step briefly outside. Vanessa causes a small stir in the mess hall as she passes among the tables soliciting funds for the miners: in the autumn she is to play in Bill Douglas' Tolpuddle film. Hare is, however, concerned not to send the visitor away without something in his notebook. He has a stab at describing the texture of the film. Well, there are no

theatrical surprises such as the revolving stage in A Map of the World; but this is no straightforward linear story either. The changes visited on the face of postwar England have been on his mind. (We're clearly a long way, however, from the world of the unlicensed pig.) This isn't a fourth 'History' play: it's very, very personal. Chiefly, he's allowed himself to dream, or rather allowed the time slippage of dreams-for what occurs on the film's fateful evening has much to do with Jean Travers' past—to influence his narrative transitions. (Ahh, it's got something of the disquieting feel of Bad Timing perhaps? Well, maybe.) A happy piece of casting has Vanessa's daughter Joely Richardson playing Jean Travers' younger self. David Hare disappears down his rabbit hole with a cordial wave: Christopher Tucker requires a moment.

Simon Relph is slightly discomfited. Not much of a story there: he feeds me some facts. Greenpoint have some intriguing items on the stocks: an adaptation of Robert McCrum's thriller In the Secret State; a Mick Ford script to be directed by Stephen Frears; a John MacKenzie project on the showman Fred Karno; and a Christopher Hampton script from a Peter Prince novel. How had Wetherby got off the ground? Verity Lambert, who'd backed Saigon, wanted to help David. Development money had been forthcoming: it was the first film Thorn-EMI had co-financed. Other partners in the enterprise are Zenith, Central Television's film offshoot, and Film Four International. Relph reckons he will have at least a year to exploit the finished product theatrically before it's called in for its three TV outings. There is, he notes, in a factual tone, not one penny of us money in these films.

Wetherby: Jean Travers (Vanessa Redgrave) in the Yorkshire rain.



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### UTOPIA UNLIMITED?

The exceptional prosperity of exhibition in France, in terms of both mainstream commercial and 'art' cinema, is the envy of most other European countries. Two hundred million annual admissions (roughly

#### Jayne Pilling

half to domestic production) rightly give cause for French self-congratulation—but not complacency, for the industry as a whole is noteworthy for its continual self-examination. At government level, this has been reflected in the Bredin Report (see SIGHT AND SOUND, Winter 1982/83) and subsequent attempts at reform.

#### THE GAJOS INITIATIVE

One of the most successful initiatives to emerge so far has been the Agency for Regional Cinema Development, whose aim is to win back an audience lost over the last two decades through the decline of cinema in small towns and rural areas, leaving 48 per cent of the population with no easy access to cinema at all. Startling claims from the Agency-an increase of six million admissions over the last eighteen months-provoked curiosity. Was it true? How did it work? Given the current situation in Britain, and the Agency's non-subsidy approach, it seemed an opportune moment to investigate. I am an advisor to some of the British Film Institute's network of regional film theatres, having myself formerly worked in exhibition, and the field trips would also give a chance to see how art cinema-or cinema d'art et essai as it is known in Francefunctioned in the regions there.

The healthy state of cinema exhibition in France is largely due to legislation in

the late 60s which encouraged investment in cinemas by enabling exhibitors to recoup a portion of the levy paid out on all admissions. This levy, the TSA, is about 13 per cent of ticket price before VAT, and goes into a rolling cinema support fund which feeds back into production, distribution and exhibition. Hence the phenomenal growth in multi-

Jack Gajos.



screen complexes. Last year the fund totalled around £54.3 million, of which 77 per cent came from the TSA, 8 per cent from TV companies and 15 per cent from the State; exhibition got back 38 per cent of its TSA contributions in investment rebate.

This incentive, however, has worked largely to the advantage of the circuits (especially as cinema chains can pool their TSA, thereby raising much larger sums than independent exhibitors). The result has been a concentration of cinemas in urban areas, seen as the more immediately profitable ones. One major circuit, for example, refuses to invest in any town with a population below 70,000. With the multi-screen complexes in large towns competing for all available prints of new releases, independent cinemas in small towns, suburbs and rural areas found themselves locked out. By the time they got, say, the annual Belmondo blockbuster, there'd be a new one out ... and much travelled prints

in poor condition would further alienate audiences. The consequent decline in attendances confirmed distributors' assertions that it wasn't worth the bother, leading inevitably to further cinema closures.

The Agency for Regional Cinema Development intends to break that vicious circle. Its somewhat controversial director, Jack Gajos, argues that increasing the provision of cinemas across the country is only worthwhile, and economically viable, if they have access to films-particularly the big hits—when they are released. The Agency, consequently, has led a twopronged initiative. Working with distributors, it funds additional prints of films like Return of the Jedi or the latest Belmondo, which it then supplies to those cinemas who would normally miss out, usually in areas with fewer than 20,000 inhabitants. Rental terms are, as usual in France on first run, 50 per cent (a maximum fixed by law). Not surprisingly, results in a test area were impressive. Some cinemas took more in one week than they had totalled in the whole of the previous year.

While arguing that blockbusters are vital to these small cinemas, Gajos also maintains that the reawakening of a community's interest in the 'cinema experience' can be extended to a wider range of films. So the Agency also funds prints of independent, regional and 'art' films: Sunday in the Country, Rue Cases Nègres, La Trace. Wenders' Paris, Texas will, as a development of this policy, circulate through the Agency in subtitled prints, as opposed to the dubbed version that will show in most provincial

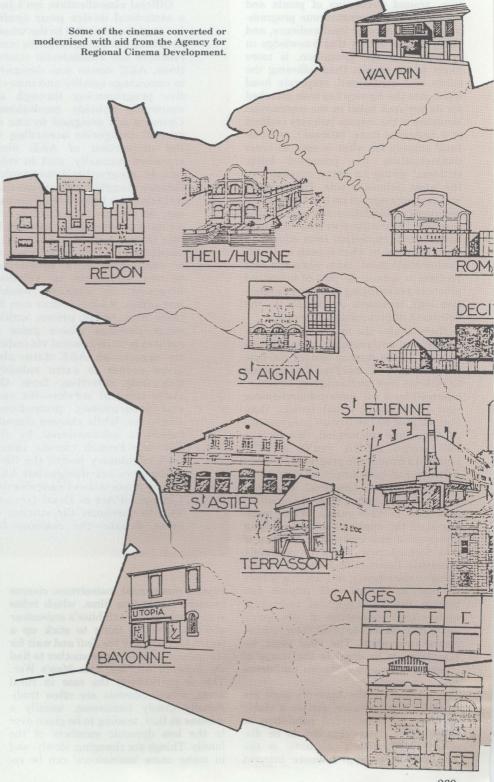
circuit cinemas.

During the initial 'access to films' experiment, the Agency prepared a map of cinema provision across France, region by region. Like a dental X-ray, this provides a visual display of areas needing attention: those where no cinema exists at all, those showing decay, and those where growth could be encouraged, such as large towns where an art cinema could flourish. Money is then available to provoke, and match, local initiatives to fill the gaps, either through renovation, twinning or reopening a closed cinema or, indeed, building a new one. The Agency can also advise on project submission, as consideration is only given to initiatives that have been thoroughly market-researched, realistically costed and planned right through to management, programming and 'animation'. The Agency's financial contribution is variable, but rarely more than a proportion of total costs, since subsequent access to films via the Agency should enable a new or revitalised enterprise to recoup its investment. There's no bias as to the source of initiatives. As long as a project is economically feasible and fulfils a perceived need, it will be encouraged, whether it comes from commercial exhibitors, local government, local organisations or would-be novice entrepreneurs.

Gajos' dynamism, pragmatic approach and flair for showmanship have helped

keep the Agency's work in the spotlight, both within the profession and at local level. The French première of Un Amour de Swann was held in Proust's native town, where almost the entire population turned out to celebrate the reopening of their local cinema and greet the director Volker Schlöndorff. The objective was not only increased press coverage for the film and the Agency; it is Gajos' contention that the professional self-image and motivation of exhibitors has suffered a decline as dramatic, and damaging, as their cinemas. Promoting films requires confidence and pride; difficult to manage if you're always selling remnants instead of this year's new fashion.

The relevance of the Agency's example for Britain may seem dubious: all very well, one might say, but socialism and subsidy don't work over here, even if they were considered viable options in the current climate. It's ironic that the rationale for the Agency's operationinstigated by the Ministry of Culture under a socialist government—has a distinctly Thatcherite tone. Gajos is adamant that the £4.5 million annual budget is not subsidy; rather it is working capital, seeding new small businesses that should then be able to function autonomously. Further, it is capital to finance a working economic model to prove to the industry that it has been missing out on a potentially lucrative



market. Then there are the multiplier effects: while there is direct stimulation for production/distribution/exhibition (and indirectly taxes), benefits also accrue to the ancillary industries—cinema equipment manufacturers, laboratories, local builders, printshops, etc. It's a sore point that although the French export cinema seating and design, screens and projectors tend to be

imported from Italy. The wager is that the Agency can make itself redundant after five years, by which time the structures established should have become a regular part of the industry, and distributors will have learnt the lesson. The aim is also to strengthen independent exhibition and encourage mutually beneficial co-operation, around circulation of prints and eventually more adventurous programming. Knowing your local audience, and being able to act on that knowledge in programming and promotion, is more likely to get results than following the edicts of a centralised, corporate head office. But the Agency has been attacked for its declared belief in the commercial structure of the cinema industry (subject to it becoming more 'rational'), and cultural subsidy for what is seen as crass commercialism has prompted bitter criticism, giving an extra resonance to the latest Belmondo title. The quickest way to gauge opinion on the Agency is to mention Les Morfalous and wait for the reaction. The controversy reflects a more fundamental opposition from some cultural quarters to what is seen as Gajos' 'commercial-realist' bias, when the real problem is seen to be that of industrial practices encouraging audience disaffection with cinematic innovation, to the

There is also the apparent contradiction of the government's simultaneous support for the Agency and for the new pay TV channel, Canal Plus. The impetus to embrace new technology is, however, informed by a far more comprehensive view of the audio-visual ecology than that adopted by the British government. As Gajos has commented, 'We have a well tended garden, you've got the jungle.' In France the progress of a film's diffusion has been firmly established in legislation: after theatrical exposure, pay TV (9-18 months), video (12 months), then free TV (2-3 years). When questioned on the apparent folly of creating hundreds of new cinemas in the face of new technologies, Gajos is resolutely optimistic. Beyond the declaration 'I like going to the cinema, so I assume others do too,' he argues that cinema can remain the focal point of communal audio-visual experience if it's quick enough on its feet to profit from technological innovation. The vital point, he maintains, is to upgrade the image of cinemas to inspire audience confidence and enjoyment.

detriment of film culture generally.

The results of the Agency's work are undeniably impressive, and as a viable strategy for commercial exhibition in other national contexts not to be discounted. What is problematic is the notion of extending audience interest

#### Is E.T. an art movie?

A recent sight and sound survey (Winter 1983/84) on art cinema exhibition in Great Britain compared the 66 cinemas where, in 1963, 'specialised', 'art' or 'minority interest' films could be seen with the 1984 figure of 43 cinemas, most of which depend heavily on subsidy. The same time span in France reveals a dramatically different situation: the number of officially designated cinemas d'art et essai shot up from 53 in 1963 to 750 in 1983.

Official classification isn't just a statistical device pour épater les anglais-it's vital to the whole institution of art et essai. As most cinemas are commercial operations, A&E status was designed to encourage quality and innovative programming through an automatic subsidy mechanism. Cinemas are assigned to one of several categories according to the proportion of A&E films screened annually, and in relation to geographic/demographic factors. Roughly, this means that a cinema in a large town showing, say, 80 per cent A&E titles gets an equivalent rate of subsidy to one showing 50-80 per cent in a smaller town. The actual amount is calculated as a proportion of TSA payments in relation, inversely, to average weekly box-office. A&E cinemas can fix their own ticket prices, unlike other cinemas where price is subject to state control via industry negotiation. A&E status also gives access to extra subsidy, this time selective, from the CNC's cultural service—for special programmes, promotional work, etc. While cinema classification is administered by the CNC (the French cinema industry's regulatory body), the films themselves are designated A&E by the Association Française des Cinémas d'Art et Essai (AFCAE). This is currently the subject of some debate-the reasons for

which become apparent as we continue with the numbers game.

The remarkable figure of 750 A&E cinemas is matched by admissions. In 1982 A&E titles accounted for 15 per cent (some 30.8 million) of total admissions. Although Paris is market leader, it only accounts for a third of A&E admissions nationally. But the classification of films as A&E, far from reflecting 'minority interest' is guided by a more general notion of 'quality'. The figures become less startling when one considers a selection of films designated A&E: The Aristocats. Tales of Ordinary Madness, Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid, Dressed to Kill. This also explains why, of all A&E films in 1982, just over 2 per cent accounted for almost half the total A&E admissions, while 54 per cent of the rest got a mere 1.6 per cent of the audience. And the most popular A&E titles-the top seventy—were seen by more people in regular commercial cinemas than in those classified A&E. Hardly surprising given distribution patterns: many independent A&E cinemas wouldn't be able to book them on first release.

The debate referred to centres on economic and political rather than aesthetic arguments. Critics of the system argue that a subsidy mechanism designed to encourage programming of less obviously commercial films now benefits cinemas which have no need of it-for the current cinema classification means many circuit screens are now A&E by virtue of showing E.T., etc... The situation reflects the evolution of traditional 'art' directors (Truffaut, Bergman and others) to relatively commercial status. That these kinds of films are now shown in circuit cinemas all over France is bitterly resented by independent A&E cinemas—particularly in Paris-for depriving them of lucrative films needed to

beyond commercial mainstream cinema to more demanding films, which relies very much on the exhibitor's animateur abilities. It's one thing to stick up a poster for Return of the Jedi and wait for the queues to form, quite another to find an audience for, say, One Man's War. This is particularly the case in rural areas, where cinemas are often traditionally family businesses, usually a sideline at that, tending to be given over to the less dynamic members of the family. Things are changing, slowly, and in many cases 'animateurs' can be re-

cruited in. There is also the argument that profit on big films can subsidise smaller audiences for more specialised films.

There is some suspicion that Gajos' forceful personality and small backroom team may be just as crucial to the enterprise as its reliance on economic logic—the argument that big business rarely acts with logic anyway. Whether the Agency's intervention can affect distribution practices in the long term remains to be seen. It certainly won't be for want of effort and imagination.

balance their ability to champion the auteurs of tomorrow. Here, moral indignation mixes uneasily with arguments born of economic desperation. The Hitchcock reissues are a case in point. Many independents argued that it was their programming over the last twenty years that established Hitchcock with the public, and now the circuits reap the benefit.

The attack grows more bitter over the selection process for A&E titles. Around 100 individuals, claimed to be a representative sample of cinemagoers, fill in forms, giving 100 per cent/ 50 per cent/25 per cent A&E ratings against titles they have seen. AFCAE protects their anonymity to avoid pressure being put on them, but this fuels accusations that it is in AFCAE's interest to commercialise A&E, to swell their own membership-and power-through circuit cinemas. AFCAE's response is to deplore 'ghetto mentality': if 'quality' films are more widely shown, it can only benefit public and filmmaker alike. And, they argue, as subsidy is inversely proportional to box-office, successful circuit A&E rebates are negligible. Further, as redistribution of TSA is administered by general accord of the industry-in which exhibition enjoys a position of strength-any change in the mechanism could produce pressure to reduce the amount that goes to all art cinemas (currently around £1.5 million).

What really seems at stake here is the power of the state to intervene directly in pursuit of cultural policy versus the industry's self-determination. 'Cahiers versus the rest' was one description of the struggle emerging from conversation—a reference to that magazine's elitist but powerful image. Over recent months Cahiers du Cinéma has run several articles on the 'banalisation' of art et essai and the crisis of the young cinéma

d'auteur. While the intellectual passion may burn most incestuously between their pages (often written by or around the struggling distributors, exhibitors and auteurs involved), it does reflect a wider sense of alarm.

From which, in part, has derived the creation of a new category of cinemas, salles de recherche, which receive a far higher rate of automatic subsidy. 'R' status requires 100 per cent A&E programming (what price Roger Corman retrospectives here?), accompanied by effective 'animation' (e.g. seasons, documentation, opportunities for exchange between audience and film-makers, critics, etc). Regional associations of salles de recherche have recently been set up to encourage co-operation and mutual support among the scattered 68 cinemas currently designated 'R'. Unlike the subsidised sector in Britain which, because so small and deriving much of its funding from the same sources, has far greater cohesion, these regional groupings are a significant new development for those whose work has suffered the demoralising effects of isolation.

In some cases money has been advanced to a distributor for acquisition of a particular film, with a small profit participation which, if materialising, feeds back into the common fund. Regional screenings of forthcoming films enable programmers to base their choices on more than Paris reviews or hyped up PR campaigns. Such regional associations also have a potential galvanising effect in that more conventional A&E cinemas with aspirations are encouraged to join too, thus gaining from initiatives too risky to be undertaken alone. As most subtitled prints are kept in Paris rather than regional depots, the £45 minimum carriage charge is often the final deterrent to booking a 'risky' film. Utopia's base in Avignon. Could they not set up a similar operation in Bédoin? The local council guaranteed a loan for re-equipment, and a Utopia team took up residence to programme and run the cinema. The range of films screened is wide, and although the absence of competition facilitates bookings of a Raiders of the Lost Ark or E.T., they show them, against all prevailing industry wisdom, with subtitles. As a result, they don't now encounter much resistance to 'foreign' art films. The cinema's success has affected the entire village economy. Villagers point with pride to people from neighbouring areas who now visit Bédoin regularly. Cafés, restaurants and petrol stations stay open later, the ringing tills adding to the conviviality the Utopia team claim as a hallmark of their cinemas.

They see their marginality, birthmark of a generation of 'soixante-huitards', as largely responsible for their success. This marginality is defined in opposition to current trends in exhibition. The fact that the range of films shown in Paris is far less than it was twenty years ago ('The Third World has practically disappeared from our screens as it has from our general consciousness') is ascribed to a standardisation of product and selling techniques to maximise immediate profit. The Paris independents who used to gain audience loyalty from a recognisable programming policy are now seen, as they fight each other for product from the majors, to have ceded to the perverted logic of the marketplace. Films often open too wide, necessitating a media blitz that extinguishes individuality and difference and consigns all but a random few to near-instant oblivion.

Given the current fashionability of the right, the attitude which views much 60s idealism as an adolescent phase to be grown out of into a mature realism, the story of Utopia's development is rather piquant. Eight years ago, three friends, a student, a psychiatric nurse and a supermarket cashier, all living in Avignon, decided to provide an alternative to the commercial films on offer. Pooling their savings to acquire a cheap lease on a basement garage, they leafletted the town with their intentions: to create not just a cinema, but a place where people could meet to share and develop their interest in all kinds of cinema. Schedules would cater to different work and leisure hours and provide long runs to allow word of mouth to build (4-5 different films on each screen between midday and midnight, rotating over several weeks in various scheduling combinations). Prices would be kept low to encourage adventurous choices. A monthly gazette would describe not only the films but the reasons for showing them, and talk to its audience, whether explaining why a film was withdrawn because of pressure from commercial exhibitors, or agreeing to keep films shown at midday to 90 minutes to cater for those who had to get back to work,

The Utopian project had begun, and as it was recounted it began to sound like a trial run for *The Young Ones*. As the pry

#### **UTOPIA LTD**

Critics of Gajos' 'fast food' approach to retailing cinema in the regions often cite the Utopia chain of cinemas as an alternative model.

Bédoin, a village in the foothills of a small mountain range in the Vaucluse, saw its only cinema close several years ago. Now it has been reopened on a fulltime basis (unusually, for rural cinemas tend to operate only three nights a week), and shows around 15-20 different films a fortnight, to average weekly admissions of 1,000. With a population of 1,500 one might wonder if this is, indeed, cinematic Utopia. When a supermarket development threatened to erase the defunct local even from memory, a group of villagers went to

conversion of the garage proceeded, electrical and plumbing disasters were only averted through intervention from passers-by; a bargain projector had to be repaired between screenings; distributors would only send films cop-so members of the audience were solicited for cheque loans, to be reimbursed from receipts the following week, when the process was repeated. After six months of precarious operation, the influx of people for the Avignon Theatre Festival put the enterprise on a sounder financial footing. Since then, Utopias have multiplied: 11 cinemas, with 21 screens between them, radiate out over Provence, with outposts as far afield as Toulon and Bayonne; twenty more are planned for next year.

In the intervening years, painful soulsearching by the ever-growing team has meant shedding some of its founding working principles. New members are interviewed for suitability rather than unconditionally embraced; the parity pay system, based on all taking turns projecting, cashiering, cleaning and making up the gazette for the printer, has been adjusted to recognise the need for someone to do the accounts full-time. Ideological mistrust of 'le leadership', discipline and accountability has ceded to pragmatism but, strangely, without fundamental compromise. The practice of training people in Avignon, then parachuting them into other areas to start new Utopia cinemas, raised dilemmas over reward for initiative. The fact that most of the parachutists tend to be women (as in Bédoin) softened the blow of discovering and capitalising on the fact that some people are just more dynamic than others. Each new operation is financially autonomous, to encourage responsibility, and though programming strategy is agreed in common, each cinema's programme takes account of its particular needs.

The story is of more than anecdotal interest. At a time when the difficulties



Bédoin: talking to the audience.

of supporting minority interest cinema have engendered much disillusion and cynicism among many in the field, when playing the cultural subsidy game is often an alluring substitute for actually making a cinema work, the Utopia success is instructive.

Avignon's five commercial cinemas, with 1,000 seats between them, get 500,000 annual admissions. Utopia's three screens, totalling 270 seats, achieve 250,000 admissions annually. Their returns have gained distributor confidence, so that often no minimum guarantees are demanded—the more established cinemas thus 'subsidis-

ing' the newly created ones by reducing financial risk. Given the number of films rotating, they have engineered a projector combining the virtues of vertical cake-stand (space-saving, no reel by reel breakdowns, easier portability of films between cinemas) without the drawbacks (damage to prints). The intimist tone of the gazette can be a little cloying, but it is undeniably effective. They have moved into distribution as a logical development of their success in rescuing films already in distribution that have fallen by the wayside, and the results have only confirmed belief in the gazette's efficacity. In Paris, a 'normal' opening of their film The Last Supper got 1,000 admissions, whereas in Avignon alone 1,600 saw the film; The Mafu Cage had 22,000 admissions in Paris, 8,000 in Avignon.

The populist programming may be disdained by the Parisian elite (a minor scandal arose when a Duras film was described as painfully boring but put on for those who liked that sort of thing), but they do show more independent French productions than most other conventional art cinemas. The goodwill of their audience is also a factor in the growth of the Utopia chain. When finance is needed for a new location, a good proportion is raised through soliciting advance purchase of season tickets.

Utopia regard the Agency's work as largely irrelevant to their own; supporting a commercial system they see as ultimately self-destructive. However, they have recently received limited Agency funding and, significantly, Gajos has recruited one of the Utopia team to run a cinema set up by the Agency. If current plans succeed, there will soon be a Utopia cinema in Paris, and it will be fascinating to see how this develops. Their invocation of Western frontier spirit, pushing back the boundaries with new settlements, might well adapt to different terrain. Paris, in such terms, is a jungle rather than a desert.

#### A&E, FESTIVALS, MOBILE CINEMAS

The Utopia cinemas are unusual. Most of the other cinemas d'art et essai I visited are more conventional, similar in many respects to provincial art houses in Britain. Programme brochures rather than press advertising establish an image distinct from that of commercial cinemas, and provide the special coverage many of the films require, given inadequate or non-existent regional press attention. A mixture of more and less commercial 'art' films is the usual programming style, and although the foreign films cropping up are remarkably similar to those distributed in Britain (The Draughtsman's Contract was playing everywhere I visited), they also show a fair amount of new French cinéma d'auteur, the kind of films we rarely see because they are judged insufficiently 'arty' for distribution. Twoscreen operations are the norm: 3-4

screens not uncommon; surprise was often expressed at even trying to get along with one screen.

The way the films are scheduled is, however, quite different. As with the Utopia cinemas, several films run over varying periods, scheduled at different times on different days; or front runners are given peak times, then moved to other slots to make way for newer titles. A rather complicated grid pattern does not, however, seem to disturb audiences. While maximising word of mouth and minimising financial risk, this scheduling may sometimes mean that a small. intimist French film might last longer on screen in a provincial town than it does in Paris. Another feature of most of these cinemas is the abonnement or carte de fidélité: a card valid for any ten screenings provides a discount on the usual ticket price and encourages more

regular cinema-going. It is also a source of interest-free capital for the exhibitor, as the volume of sales can be significant. Some large company unions buy them en bloc and then, through further discount, offer them as staff perks.

Many provincial towns hold annual film or combined arts festivals which give the public a chance to catch up on a range of films that never reach the screens of their commercial cinemas, as well as introducing lesser known areas of film-making. These events are often important in arousing an interest that can prepare the groundwork for the establishment of a full-time A&E cinema. Such Rencontres, Journées Cinématographiques and festivals seem lately to have reached epidemic proportions, though many are little more than municipally sponsored boosts to tourism, e.g. Cognac's Thriller Fest, other events

in off-peak sports resorts. More serious festivals can obtain some funding from the CNC's cultural service, which also helps with waivers for import duties and censorship regulation. Support depends on the nature of each event, but the main criteria are the introduction of different kinds of cinema to audiences, particularly films not in distribution, and the *animateur* effect of the festival itself—seen as a necessary counterbalance to the passive experience of the multi-screen complex.

The Festival des Trois Continents in Nantes is an amazingly ambitious enterprise, introducing, as the name suggests, a range of little-known world cinema. Although it took a couple of years to establish itself, its local success has prompted national distribution of many of the films thus introduced; for example, titles by Xie Jin were acquired as a result of its massive Chinese retrospective.

Nearly all these events arise from initiatives by groups of local enthusiasts, heavily dependent on voluntary part-time labour (shorter working hours for secondary teachers is an important factor here). The success of these efforts, however, often results in the creation of full-time paid posts. Gros Plan, based in Quimper, Brittany, is an interesting example. After working for several years as a voluntary group, initiating film events in venues around town, they have been running a festival fortnight for the last two years, organised around a theme and involving the local art college.

This year they concentrated on Ameri-

can cinema. Although the programme was something of a hotch-potch of repertory, art documentaries and films not in distribution (e.g. Zoot Suit, for which one might argue there's good reason), which hardly came up to the standard of, say, seasons at London's Electric Cinema in its heyday, the festival's importance lies in its effect on the town. Nearly all local cinemas are involved, and the whole town is decorated. Walking along the narrow river running through Quimper, it is like cinematic Christmas time, coloured lights strung along the quais and posters everywhere. The indefatigable Tavernier introduced a programme of his choice in us cinema: Wenders and Robert Duvall attended, and the public had the chance to talk with film-makers and critics.

Gros Plan's work in creating an eager cinema audience has finally resulted in the municipality's co-funding of the town's first A&E cinema. The work of such associations is vital to much art et essai regionally in France. It is difficult at first to grasp the impact of the réseau associatif, accustomed as we are to associating voluntary organisations with social work or hobbies. Associations enjoy special status in France; they can establish companies on a nonprofit distributing basis, and benefit from several fiscal exemptions. Another example is Ombres Vives, an association in Villeneuve-d'Asques, a new town outside Lille, responsible for running five full-time screens, of which three are commercial, two A&E, with sixteen fulltime staff employed. The cinemas were co-financed by the municipality (£12,000 capital, £4,000 staffing) and the Agency, but with 300,000 annual admissions they can continue unaided. It is mainly from the *réseau associatif* that another striking phenomenon in rural France has emerged—the resurgence of mobile cinema.

L'Ecran Mobile serves rural areas around Lyon and was created with aid from the Agency to buy a van fitted with portable 35mm equipment and screens. Begun by a small group whose experience came from film societies and A&E cinemas, L'Ecran Mobile serves 23 localities organising 5-6 screenings a week, working with village associations to ensure the necessary promotion. I accompanied the van one afternoon for a screening of The Aristocats. Driving through the countryside, we passed the bus organised by a schoolteacher which provides audience pick-up points, and when we reached the screening venue we were greeted by the smell of popcorn prepared on camping stoves by a couple of local mothers doubling as cashiers. The local association (or sometimes municipality) gets 10 per cent of the boxoffice, with 40 per cent going to L'Ecran Mobile to cover costs, and 50 per cent to the distributor. Although it's not a particularly lucrative business, it can break even, and after only six months operation a quarter of the initial investment has been recouped through TSA rebate.

While the Agency has helped many such itinerant circuits in this burgeoning sector, there is some anxiety that promised additional 16mm prints, which encouraged the formation of many such enterprises, have not materialised, making it more difficult to mount an attractive and varied programme. It usually takes three years from theatrical opening for commercial films to become available on 16mm, although the mobile cinemas' stimulus to the market may change this. It is for this reason, as well as quality, that many are using 35mm, on which gauge films are often available a few months after theatrical release.

Obviously, regional art cinema exhibition flourishes far more in France than in Britain, although there are as many similarities as differences in programming style. A far higher level of subsidy to distribution for specialised, minority and particularly Third World cinema obviously helps. On the other hand, there seems more regular repertory and retrospective programming in regional film theatres here, and there is nothing equivalent to the invaluable Archive access BFI-supported cinemas enjoy. (No mention has been made of the Cinémathèque de Toulouse or Lyon's Lumière Institute, which deserve articles of their own.) Where the French score heavily is in more imaginative promotion, helped by the generally higher standard of cinema poster design . . . though it's also a factor that French café/bar/restaurants offer far more glass frontage than in England. Given, however, the many similarities in intent and operation, and problems involved in regional 'art' exhibition, information exchange could only be of mutual benefit.



## The Painted Bay

#### Susan Barrowclough on Nice's revitalised Victorine Studios

The Promenade des Anglais, an apartment overlooking the Mediterranean and the semi-circular sweep of the Baie des Anges painted on to the three curving walls of Sound Stage 1, with the lighthouse of Cap Ferrat winking at you in the distance —this was the central set constructed at the Victorine Studios in Nice for Jean-Paul Belmondo's latest film Joyeuses Pâques. When the producer investigated shooting on the real Promenade just a few metres down the hill, he found the cost prohibitive. These days it is cheaper to build the illusion than it is to film reality itself. Facts of life like this give Philippe Demange, the new director of the Victorine, confidence for the future as he revives one of France's oldest and most important film studios. The vicissitudes of the Victorine mirror the fortunes of the cinema itself. The studios, which have often been on the verge of closure in the last thirty years, were given a resounding lease of life a year ago by the financial investment of LTM, France's biggest film, television and video equipment company, and today they have at least fifty years before them assured by the town of Nice, the owner of the land.

Walking around the Victorine is like walking through the history of the cinema. Rex Ingram's Mare Nostrum, Marcel Carné's Les Enfants du Paradis and François Truffaut's La Nuit Américaine were all made here. While the sets are no longer standing, the prop rooms are full of traces: dusty chandeliers, ornate mirrors, café signs, telephone kiosks and every imaginable sort of clock. The carpentry and paint shops date from the studio's beginnings in 1919, and while the craftsmen look and sound like characters from a Pagnol film-their names Nono, Pistou and Jean-Eustache proudly painted on their lockers-today they are constructing the sets for an American Coca-Cola commercial. Some of them have worked here for over forty years.

Scattered over seventeen acres amid palm trees and bougainvillea, there are four newly renovated or constructed soundstages, the largest 12,000 square feet, a new auditorium equipped with post-sync and mixing facilities, five editing rooms and a machinery shop bursting with pristine new lights, cameras, booms and cranes. And in the middle is the nineteenth century villa of Prince

d'Essling, destined to be the stars' dressing-rooms.

Nice has been a centre of French cinema since its birth. Lumière's first films were shown here in February 1896, two months after Paris. Then the pioneers arrived: technicians and film-makers from Paris in search of the light they could not find in the north. When Louis Nalpas founded the Victorine, Gaumont and Pathé also had studios in Nice and Feuillade was making some of his Fantômas series in the area; later Jean Vigo started the local Ciné-Club and showed the films of Eisenstein. In 1930 the Victorine was the only studio in the south to survive the transfer to sound. Today, it is still the only one of France's four studios outside the Paris area.

Its survival is due ironically to Hollywood and later to the German occupation. In 1924 Rex Ingram, frustrated by the constraints of the California system, came to Nice with his wife, the actress Alice Terry. He first made Mare Nostrum here and on his behalf MGM pumped money into the Victorine, of which Ingram had become director. The two original glass studios were closed in and another constructed; the laboratories were modernised and a powerful new generator installed. Once a little Hollywood had been created in the South of France, Ingram made three further films here, including The Garden of Allah (1927) which took advantage of nearby North African locations. When Ingram was not using the studios himself, they were rented out to directors such as Marcel L'Herbier, who shot Le Diable au Coeur here.

By the 30s, however, the Victorine was already in decline. The fashion for studio films led film-makers to Paris; the sunlight of the south was less in demand. Although directors such as Renoir, Pagnol, Grémillon and Pabst worked at the Victorine, the rate of film-making there steadily declined. But, as Odessa had had its moment when the Russian film community fled south from the civil war. so too did Nice, for it remained in the unoccupied zone until 1942. American films were banned from the screens and the public certainly did not want to see German ones. L'Herbier, Gance, Allégret and Carné came to the Victorine to continue working. Carné made Les Visiteurs du Soir at the studios and in the countryside around, and Les Enfants du Paradis

was made entirely at the studios, apart from a few interior scenes shot in Paris. The Boulevard du Crime is now a car park, but then it covered 2,000 feet, with the facades of fifty theatres and houses built by the Victorine's decor department.

In 1945 fire destroyed a number of the stages and things went badly for the studios until the mid-50s, when there was more production and state aid encouraged a newly vitalised French cinema. René Clément came: Gérard Philipe starred in Fanfan La Tulipe, and later Ophuls made Lola Montès and Tati Mon Oncle. Hollywood came back to the Victorine as well. Hitchcock, Hathaway and Ray made films here in the 50s. While American production went on at the Victorine in the 60s, there was less French production. The aesthetics of the Nouvelle Vague were not those of studio artifice and until the 1980s the Victorine languished, constantly changing hands and often on the point of bankruptcy. The town of Nice considered turning the historic site into a public park.

Then LTM arrived on the scene. Well

connected in the international world of the cinema, with two affiliates in the us, the company has invested 14 million francs in the modernisation of the Victorine and Jack Lang's Ministry of Culture has given it a 1.4 million franc grant. In its first six months, La Société Victorine-Côte d'Azur has made Joyeuses Pâques: The Year of the Meduse by Christopher Frank and parts of four other French films have been shot at the studios. At the moment the Americans are making a number of commercials there and episodes of the television series Remington Steele are being shot in the studios and on nearby locations. For the future Philippe Demange is negotiating four film contracts (three French, one American) and a possible BBC series.

It will be interesting to watch the renaissance of the Victorine in the years to come, for it will depend on the type of cinema being made in the 80s and 90s and the administration's ability to mix media. Although the Victorine has more to offer than most studios—the nearby locations of the Alps, the sea and the landscape of the south—it is the use of its studio facilities which will decide its future. After all, a set of the Promenade des Anglais is not only cheaper to shoot than the real thing, it can look better than its original . . .

#### **DOUBLE TAKES**

#### Freeway

It seems to me that the Government's Film Policy White Paper, in which Films Minister Kenneth Baker proudly announced a 'new deal' for British films, is a decidedly rum shuffling of the same old cards—unlikely to produce the kind of royal flush that would win any battle to save the current mini-revival from petering out exactly as its predecessor did twenty-five years or so ago.

Admittedly, it was probably a good thing to scrap the Eady levy, generally these days a great burden to the exhibition wing of the industry and an incentive only for Americans to cobble together a spurious deal with which to qualify for the available money, and then put out popular rubbish to sweep up as much of it as possible. Mr Baker called it 'an elaborate and unfair burden on the industry's weakest sector', and it is easy to agree with him. But the winding up of the National Film Finance Corporation, which has limped from crisis to crisis in recent years largely through lack of proper financing, is surely a step back into the Ark, even for this privateenterprise-mad administration. No wonder the energetic Mamoun Hassan resigned well before the announcement. As the NFFC's managing director, he has had an impossible job for a long time, but has certainly not made a bad fist of it. The trouble was that he was expected to produce a winner every time. You are supposed to do that only about twice in ten shots in Hollywood, or anywhere where the state gives aid and comfort to a particular film industry.

Consider how far the now well-publicised and popular Australian cinema would have got if this Government had been steering its fortunes with a hand round its neck. Not very far at all. The fact is that Malcolm Fraser, whom Margaret Thatcher regarded with such admiration, was far more enlightened than her chaps have been, though hardly a natural saviour of the arts. He once stated that when he went to Washington and gave a press conference, he got a column or so to himself in the main American papers. But when an Australian film which people liked opened in New York, it often got half a page to itself. Ergo, he provided ample financial aid to aspiring film-makers and encouraged the individual states to do the same. He regarded it as an excellent and relatively very cheap way of putting his country in the news once Australian sportsmen began failing to do it. And he was right.

With ill-concealed complacency, Mr Baker said that he had been able to make satisfactory arrangements to replace the money raised by the Eady levy. Which assumes that it raised enough in the first place (not true) or went to the right quarters (hardly ever). The new



Guardian lecturer: Robert Mitchum with Derek Malcolm. Photo: Sten M. Rosenlund.

company in the private sector, though claimed to be able to deploy more than double the resources which the NFFC has had in recent years, looks pathetically thin in capital to finance 'low and medium budget films to be made in Britain', even if it should genuinely want to. The film of George Orwell's 1984, for instance, would be well beyond its capabilities and so would either *Chariots of Fire* or *Local Hero*, which Mr Baker conjured up from his memory as examples of the new renaissance.

Altogether, the whole business seems a sorry affair—much too little, much too late. It will hardly make those energetic and hopeful people organising British Film Year jump for joy. 'Our policy,' says the white paper, already looking distinctly brown at the edges, 'is to free the film industry from Government intervention . . . and will clear the way for the industry to operate in a more confident framework and to consolidate upon its success.' Free the film industry? Clear the way? What on earth is Mr Baker talking about? Free it from what, pray? Clear the way for what? Cloud Cuckooland is alive and well, domiciled at the Department of Trade.

#### No slouch

Guardian Lectures at the National Film Theatre, though intrinsically a very good idea, tend to vary from the sublime to the ridiculous. My idea of the ridiculous are those none too infrequent occasions when some aged Hollywood personage, with nothing of significance to say, gets oleaginously introduced by a quaking hack and then proceeds to tell us how wonderful it was to work with X or Y, even when you know perfectly well that it can't have been.

These occasions are really exactly the same as your average publicity interview, in which the star or director pontificates about the significance of his or her latest product and praises to the skies everyone involved in it. 'They told me Mavis Clump was going to be trouble,' we read with ever hopeful anticipation that the rumours might be true. But, of course, she never was. A real professional, in fact. And charmingly helpful to the merest youngster in the cast.

There are an increasing number of these interviews about, and I can't think why even the serious papers and magazines print them so uncritically. Probably because they were set up in the first place by the publicity people, whom harassed arts editors are loth to offend lest the next Mavis Clump who should come their way goes to some rival. How nice it would be to read more aggressive film pieces somewhere. Think of what Spielberg might reply if asked why Indiana Jones was such a load of old carrots (which it certainly was), or how Faye Dunaway would cope with a question about the foolishness of her Lady Macbeth-type comedy act in the truly awful Supergirl. The truth is that film stars, directors and the like have a vested interest in saying that everything in their little, highly paid club is going swimmingly. It's the you-scratch-my-back principle, and it beats me why people go on writing or reading it.

The Guardian Lectures, of course, are a more awkward matter, since they either come very cheap because the famous person has just completed a film he or she wants to publicise, or very expensive because he or she is so staggeringly old that a personal Concorde has to be sent off to Los Angeles to fetch them out of retirement. And you really can't be beastly to the ancient, even if the audience, who have invariably

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come along to gaze and cheer, would allow you.

Yet sometimes a miracle does happen, and one of them this summer was called Robert Mitchum, generally thought to be quite likely to be rather a nuisance on such trying occasions. After all, it is well known (and absolutely true) that he never actually sees his own films once he has made them, never reads a word of what anyone writes about him, unless his lawyer brings it to his attention, and tends to answer most questions with the words: 'Have another drink'" Yet here he was, fresh as paint and dry as a squeezed orange, prepared not only to be asked fairly impertinent questions but to vouchsafe to a rightly ecstatic audience a series of superbly mimicked portraits of those he had worked with. Some of the lecture was shot by a Channel 4 team. and if they are not too frightened of the result it should shortly be coming up on our screens.

The point is that he was not only very funny but extremely pertinent with it too. It's said he used to be a bit of a poet in his younger days, and I can quite believe it, since the portraits had the same accuracy, economy and flair as the best verse. What is more, they were seldom malicious, except in the case of poor Josef von Sternberg, with whom he made Macao and who, he said, was regarded as a European in America and an American in Europe, and desperately clung to his distinguished emigrant status in both continents. Mitchum said that he and Jane Russell had to make up most of their own dialogue in Macao, which was so badly cut together after Sternberg had walked off in a huff that he (Mitchum) sometimes found himself walking into a room and meeting himself. Actually, Macao looks wonderful now, so it all must have been put right by Nicholas Ray and others who were brought in to salvage the wreck. But they never used the line Mitchum thought up when he kisses Jane as she comes downstairs for breakfast. 'What?' says Jane. 'Sex before breakfast?' 'No,' says Mitchum, 'for breakfast.'

Mitchum's little essay on Howard Hawks was particularly constructive, demythologising the man in a way of which he would surely have approved. Apparently, in El Dorado, Mitchum several times objected to characters who had already been shot returning to the scene, only to hear Hawks exclaim: 'Oh what the hell, we'll change it.' He added that, contrary to myth, Hawks was never at all certain about where his plots were leading him and frequently committed such clangers. Then he would have the film previewed again and again, much in the manner of today, and take out what audiences didn't like

But the best portraits were of the worst directors, who shall tactfully be nameless in this column. And he even ended up with an uncannily accurate Joan Collins impersonation. There's no doubt the man has immense talent that has never been properly exploited, especially in comedy. His last words to Derek Malcolm, his interviewer, had that worthy in stitches. Malcolm summed up by saying he had dreaded the interview because he had heard Mitchum was 'difficult' but had, in fact, like the rest of the audience, vastly enjoyed it. 'Oh,' said Mitchum, feigning feyness, 'I bet you say that to all the girls.' I doubt if that's on the Channel 4 transmission.

#### Dolce vita

The Taormina Festival is, quite frankly, for lotus-eaters. You only have to see two films a day, and that is made pretty difficult, since most of the press stay down at the beach hotels and the films get shown in the town-which is up and up and up an exceedingly steep hill. Few buses climb it, the taxi rates are exorbitant and the festival's minibus has a dreadful habit of not going at the right time. Or not going at all. The other difficulty is that you get dinner paid for in your hotel, but the dining rooms don't open till eight and the minibus, if it does arrive, leaves before half-past. Consequently, if the dolce trolley looks dolce, you tend to give up. As a matter of fact, you can't usually get that far. The point is that by that stage you have half surrendered anyway, since there is nothing quite so tiring as doing nothing in a hot sun and by eight of the clock in the evening you are absolutely exhausted, if not emotional as well.

Still, it is sometimes better not to see the films, which are generally not very good, having been squeezed by both Cannes and the upcoming Venice. Try as he may, the Direttore Artistico, Guglielmo Biraghi, can't hook many big fish and is not aided by Sicily's Machiavellian politics. So what he gives us each year is a jolly good time and, since he is the most charming of men, nobody ever grumbles at him.

This year, some of the competition films were pretty dire, though the French The Princes, which won the Cariddi d'Oro, was an intriguingly exuberant piece of film-making and the New Zealand Constance, which did not, seemed to me a fine measure of the newfound confidence of the cinema in those far-flung parts. And at least, on the final night, we did not have a repeat of the big television spectacular of previous years in the open-air Teatro Antico, at which the prizes were announced, rather grudgingly, between layers of the most appalling singing, dancing and comedy acts, with local and Italian celebrities fighting for their share of the limelight and the poor prizewinners hustled off the stage the moment they'd collected their pots. This year, there was a nice bit of ballet, the prizes and then the Harry Belafonte-inspired Beat Street to round off the evening on a popular if not very up-market note.

The second year of American films—all the dreck Hollywood wants to sell to Italy, including Beat Street and the devastatingly silly Reckless by James Foley—proved distinctly more popular with the locals than the festival movies. Which perhaps proves that a bad entertainment film is essentially less tedious to sit through than a very moderate art movie. I think the time has probably come at Taormina to give the tourists and the Sicilians the bread and circuses they want up at the Antico and relegate all but the prizewinning festival products to one or other of the town's two cinemas. That way, everyone gets what they want—the local tourist board, the city elders and those foolhardy long-



Robert Mitchum and Nastassja Kinski in Andrei Konchalovsky's Maria's Lovers.

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hairs who insist that one day Taormina could rival Venice.

The truth is that it never will, but that many of the smaller festivals have a charm of their own which easily rivals the bigger events. Taormina is a lovely spot and a festival, despite its obvious weaknesses, that it is impossible not to cherish. I won't hear another word against it. The lunches at our hotel, by the beachside pool cut into the rocks, were superb. And the view over the Isola Bella, with belching Etna in the distance on the other side, was enough to make Satan weak at the knees. If Biraghi were English, he must have been accorded a knighthood by now, just for reminding people that festivals can be fun. Is that really so much of a sin anyway?

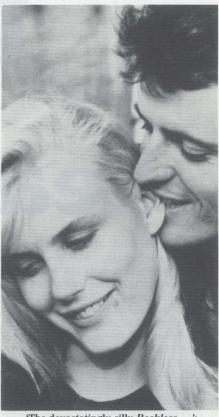
#### Progrom notes

Since my efforts to publicise the efforts of Indians to publicise their movies in other than their native tongue, I have had several letters pleading for further pidgin. The list, my friends, is endless. And it is not only Indian. English as she is rote is a language by itself these days—all over the world, like a kind of Esperanto.

Here's one from Italy, for instance: 'Leila Philippe is a susation newly-born, pulsating through the screen with immunse flower, her body with corporate glow. Alberto Magnoli unites absolutely with her in this rometic commedia of the ear.' And from Indonesia comes: 'We have never opted for more glorious colour than with this epique of half-remembered dues. You will sigh, you will scream, you will fear to grab your neighbour's biscuit as our tail unflows. Please come, very quickely. Big stars are inclouded on the progrom.'

Not that the Yanks are much better. Here is a piece of dialogue proudly quoted from the film Reckless which I mentioned above: 'There's something I got to do. I've got to go. I don't know where—just somewhere, out of here, and I've got to go now. See, I get real frustrated 'cause there's lots of stuff that I feel and that I wanna say. But it just-it just doesn't come out right, so I start knocking into things ... and hurting them. I don't wanna hurt you-I just want-need-I need you to come with me and do everything with me and feel everything with me, 'cause it's just no good alone'—Aidan Quinn as Johnny Rourke. Thank you, Aidan. Don't knock into us . . .





'The devastatingly silly Reckless . . .':
Daryl Hannah, Aidan Quinn.

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#### The German émigrés in Paris during the 1930s

# Pathos and Leave-taking

Paris, which had always delighted me when on holiday, was too beautiful... Emigration was no hardship, it was an outing. The reflections on the wet boulevards during the lit-up nights, breakfast in Montmartre, with a glass of brandy, coffee and the warm brioches, the gigolos and prostitutes who hadn't slept all night... a room beneath the roof in a sweet old hotel in the rue Lord Byron, where I lived ... all Paris was there, just as little Moritz imagines it-and it received me with its own intelligent nonchalance. The night porter ... invited me to join him in a coup de rouge and predicted confidently: 'Ca va s'arranger, Monsieur . . . j'en suis sur. Chacun au monde a deux patries. La sienne et Paris.'

-Max Ophuls, Spiel im Dasein, 1959

With characteristic lightness of touch, Max Ophuls evokes here the myth of Paris as the natural home of European émigrés. His picture is already lit like a film set, and it turns exile into a bitter-

#### Thomas Elsaesser

sweet romance. If the 1920s belonged to Berlin as the capital of Europe, Paris undoubtedly dominated the 1930s, intellectually and politically. But the Germans who came to France after 1933 experienced the early part of the decade as a much happier period than its turbulent ending, caught as they then were in

the threefold insecurity of being enemy aliens, administrative embarrassments and politically or racially persecuted refugees. The writers and politicians of the collapsed Weimar Republic have put on record how the unenviable choice between internment and deportation darkened life after 1940, when it was officers of the Wehrmacht, like Ernst Jünger, who rejoiced at being posted to Paris.

By then the film-makers had left for Britain or America, and in most histories of the cinema the German film emigration to France features at best as an episode, a stage on the journey whose destination was Hollywood. France was merely the waiting room, the films produced there ways of passing the time until the contract from Warners, Universal or MGM came through. This



Sans Lendemain (Ophuls, 1939): Edwige Feuillère, Jane Marken

somewhat casual estimation, though contradicted by first-hand accounts such as that of Curtis Bernhardt, who had no intention of going to America until he was forced to, is seemingly confirmed by the fact that few of the films made by German directors were outstandingly successful with the French public (though some did rather better than their critical reputation would indicate). And since film history, like all history, tends to belong to the victors and the survivors, the work of a whole generation during almost a decade has become a thin slice sandwiched between the glories of a German career and its Hollywood apotheosis.

There are problems in writing about the German émigrés as a group, and of their films as a body of work. For one thing, even today, historians face quite a task in unearthing the films from archives. For another, each director, each technician and each film participates in several histories at once. The individuals have their own history, and exile is always a personal tragedy that finds little consolation in numbers. For German film-makers, however, working in France was neither as new nor as traumatic and isolating as it was for writers and other intellectuals. They were, after all, part of the international film industry, where France, Germany and Hollywood competed for shares in the national and European markets: paradoxically by collaboration, by coproductions and multi-language versions, by leasing and hiring each other's assets, whether these be stars or production facilities, patents or distribution rights. Hollywood companies, such as Paramount, had studios in Paris, and UFA in Berlin had French stars under contract, from Maurice Chevalier to Jean Gabin, while French companies made pictures about legionnaires in the sand dunes of Neubabelsburg.

Who, then, were the directors working in France during the 1930s? Max Ophuls made six films, and so did G.W. Pabst. Fritz Lang made only one, but Robert Siodmak made nine films and Curtis Bernhardt four-not counting the French-language versions of their German films. The list of those who made one or two films includes Billy Wilder, Robert Wiene, Ludwig Berger, Wilhelm Thiele, Kurt Gerron, Max Nosseck, Richard Eichberg, Victor Trivas. But the crossover logic between the industry and these individuals has two names attached to it: Seymour Nebenzahl and Erich Pommer, rival producers in Germany who now found themselves in France. Nebenzahl was owner of Nero Film, the company responsible for almost a dozen of the émigrés' films; and Pommer, formerly the all-powerful head of UFA's international production, worked in France for a Hollywood company, 20th Century-Fox, in which capacity he provided work for many of his former UFA staff.

Without Pommer and Nebenzahl's business sense and international connections, many of the directors, and especially scriptwriters, would not have been able to work in France at all. The producers, for their part, could mount projects in such apparently difficult conditions, despite the political turn of events in 1933, precisely because of the long-established and initially uninterrupted competition by co-operation between the German and French industries. Having already set up, supervised and marketed French-language versions of most major German productions, Nebenzahl, Pommer, Eugen Tuscherer and a few others moved into original French films with relative ease. Are the films themselves, then, merely as they are often described in the history books: pale copies of Weimar films and failed imitations of French cinema?

A good example of the émigré film would be Le Chemin de Rio (Robert Siodmak, 1936), produced by Nebenzahl, with dialogue by Henri Jeanson and music by Paul Dessau, a composer who later worked with Bertolt Brecht, in California and then in East Berlin. The film is basically three stories: a titillating 'white slave trade' exposé; a screwball comedy about two newspaper reporters, male and female, both in disguise and both after the same scoop; and a typically French story about jealous fathers and wayward daughters. It opens with the fantastic decor of a brothel where an orgy is in full swing, beadily surveyed by a madam straight out of Pabst's Joyless Street. A man enters, walks upstairs, the camera framing his broad back as he advances on one of the girls. She

> Mollenard (Siodmak, 1937): Harry Baur, Dalio.

screams, backs away, throws herself over the balustrade and falls to her death. We then cut to a different location, different characters, a different time: it makes the opening scene violent, enigmatic, but in an odd sense undramatic because not part of the story's time-space continuum.

The rupture is deliberate and unsettling: two temporalities—that of the intrigue and that of the mise en scène of each incident—contend with each other. The brothel scene self-consciously displays itself not only as a stylistic tour de force but also as a quotation from the German cinema of the 1920s. There is no dialogue, only music and the orchestration of glances, movements, shadows and decor. The Expressionist pathos becomes almost playful within the realistic decor, and because we do not know who the characters are, the violent drama becomes itself choreography and artifice. The film thus moves in two registers: that of the intrigue, with its narrative complications, and the playing-for-effect of the set-pieces, so that the scenes almost seem detached from the story to which they belong. Once the film has established this double focus of attention, it becomes the defining feature of its own particular tone. Each story functions more as a formal than a dramatic counterpart to the others, resulting in an emotional register that is both melodramatically direct and wistfully

This search for a structural principle of counterpoint, within theatrical or melodramatic material, seems to me the German directors' central contribution to French cinema, and it goes some way



towards explaining why films as diverse as Le Chemin de Rio, Mollenard (1937), Liliom (1933) or De Mayerling à Sarajevo (1940) emphasise the selfcontained and discrete nature of their different action spaces and locations. The stark opposition of Dunkirk and Shanghai in Mollenard, or of the fairground and the wooden hut in Liliom (not to mention the scene in Heaven), isn't just because the locations are all studio sets, but testifies to a will to create symmetry through alternation (as in the hotel/tenement block opposition in Murnau's Der letzte Mann), and at the same time to vary it with a subtle rhythm of asymmetry, by making the locations different in tone and dramatic

Harry Baur in Shanghai is not the same Harry Baur when he arrives in Dunkirk-which is the point of the story-but instead of showing this as a process of degradation, of psychological or physical decline, Siodmak simply makes him play a different character, as if two separate films had been mounted back to back. Similarly, in the opening scene of Carrefour (Curtis Bernhardt, 1938), an atmospheric montage of feet stalking through rustling leaves, high walls shrouded in fog and shadowy figures scurrying through trees seems disconnected from the subsequent courtroom drama, which switches locations between an upper-class Parisian villa, a nightclub and a suburban factory. The style is one of discontinuity and clash, both in dramatic tone and in the mixing of genres within the same film; the effect a certain sense of abstraction and reflection.

In Carrefour a successful businessman gradually realises that he may have been a wanted criminal, that everything he remembers from his past may simply be what others have told him, an illusionist trick of identification and projection which must make him doubt the reality of his feelings for his wife and child. The film's premise, namely that a war wound caused amnesia, is featured less prominently than the Romantic-Expressionist theme of the Doppelgänger and the play with time, where the palpable and the visible split open to disclose a dimension which is neither past nor present. The uncanny, like irony, is a mode of divided perception, and awareness of a double focus in narrative and representation is one of the principles that the German cinema of the late Weimar period seems to have carried into exile.

These formal categories are not, however, the criteria usually applied to the German cinema, which has suffered the curious fate of becoming the test case for several contradictory approaches to film history and the sociology of mass media. German cinema of the 1920s is almost always interpreted as a reflection of right-wing ideologies and extremist politics, a cinema which had Nazism as its terminal point. Fascism is seen to give it ideological coherence, just as conveniently expandable versions of Expressionism and adduced to testify to its



Liliom (Lang, 1933): Charles Boyer is taken to heaven.

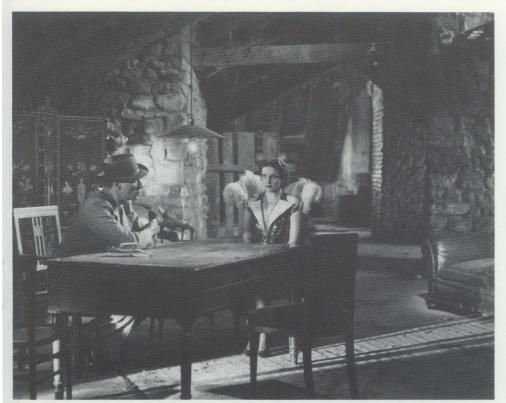
aesthetic coherence. That its largest studio was taken over by a man of ultraconservative politics almost comes as an added bonus.

The steady stream of German émigrés from the 20s onwards seems on the face of it to confirm the 'political' thesis, while the influence of German directors on Hollywood confirms the 'stylistic' thesis. But how convincing is this? Lubitsch, Murnau, Dieterle, Lang, Pabst, Siodmak, Wilder, Sirk all left Germany and had notable careers abroad. The circumstances of their leaving varied widely, but the critical paradigm demands that they are all somehow associated with the mass exodus of writers and intellectuals after Hitler came to power, and that Expressionism (as dramatic lighting techniques, unusual camera angles, shadowy sets or haunted protagonists) was the only cinematic luggage they carried with them westwards. This leaves one with a basic contradiction: that of treating the émigrés as anti-fascists while identifying their work with features that supposedly gave rise to fascism. The literature on Fritz Lang is a case in point, where the dilemma simply refuses to resolve itself. Was Expressionism proto-fascist in the 20s and subversive in

The question looms in the background whenever films by Siodmak, Ulmer, Ophuls, Bernhardt, Sirk, John Brahm and others are discussed under the label of *film noir* or melodrama. Although these genres are now recognised as specifically German contributions to American cinema, it is still debatable whether they relate to so-called Expressionist cinema, not to mention whether they bear any resemblance to the films made by the same directors in the 30s either as German or French productions.

Sometimes they do, sometimes they don't: Sirk's Schlussakkord (1936) is arguably close to a 50s melodrama; Siodmak's La Crise est Finie (1934) is definitely not a film noir. For neither director, however, is a reference to Expressionism of great help. Sirk's UFA films, as Jon Halliday has shown, were studio assignments that reflected the genre and star vehicle formula of American pictures rather than the art cinema approach of Pommer's promotion of Expressionism as a quality label in the 20s. Siodmak, after his first film, Menschen am Sonntag, became the surprise success of 1929, was associated with documentary and semi-documentary realism.

It might be argued that one is simply dealing with different generations. Pabst was born in 1885, Lang in 1890, Siodmak and Ophuls in 1900 and 1902 respectively. However, when one looks up French or British reviews from the early 30s, it is evident that the critics identified the German cinema with a style and that what they expected from it was social commitment, the tough realism of such popular successes as M (Lang, 1930), Kameradschaft (Pabst, 1931), Berlin Alexanderplatz (Piel Jutzi, 1931) or Mädchen in Uniform (Leontine Sagan, 1931). For the influential journal Close Up or the London Film Society, it was Pabst's work in particular, from Die freudlose Gasse (1925) to Die Dreigroschenoper (1931), that typified what was best in German cinema. Hence the distinct and persistent disappointment with the films the Germans made in France, which failed to find favour with the critics not so much because they were ponderously Teutonic or Expressionist but because they appeared too light, frivolous, superficial. La Crise est Finie seemed 'a deliberate attempt to



Le Drame de Shanghai (Pabst, 1938): Louis Jouvet, Christiane Mardayne.

copy the exuberant revue musicals of Warner Brothers' and there is hardly an émigré film-maker who isn't at some point compared with René Clair.

If in the case of Ophuls' La Tendre Ennemie (1936) the comparison was complimentary ('Clair without the snobbery'), more often it was intended disparagingly. Francis Courtade, speaking of Lang's Liliom, takes up most of the clichés of the time: 'Liliom is a bit like Sous les Toits de Paris, Le Million and Le Quatorze Juillet. But Fritz Lang is no René Clair and evidently he felt ill at ease. M was more his line.' Lang was shooting Liliom for Pommer while Ophuls was preparing On a Volé un Homme, also for Pommer. 'In my opinion,' Ophuls said, 'this was a double mistake. Pommer should have done it the other way round. Lang would certainly have made a remarkable thriller, while I probably would have turned out a good romantic comedy.'

It is usually argued, from hindsight, that the German cinema declined between 1927 and 1933: as Weimar crumbled, so did its cinema. The economic evidence, however, tells another story, for the film-makers who quit Germany in 1933 left behind a buoyant industry, and one that was technically highly proficient. During the early years of sound, it thrived on diversity. The German industry's range of thrillers, social problem films, psychological dramas and musicals enabled its filmmakers to adapt quite easily to the commercial demands of other national cinemas. What makes this appear weakness rather than strength is the assumption that German films had a unified aesthetic style with an identifiable social meaning. By a curious paradox, the less typically 'German' (that is Expressionist) German films became, the more the German cinema is said to have suffered a decline, whose outward sign was the Nazi takeover.

In the France of 1934, with unemployment rising and a succession of unstable governments, the German film-makers, however much they might have thought of themselves as political refugees, were eyed by their hosts as a threat and an intrusion. Protest demonstrations were called and, under union pressure, the government became selective about work permits. Chauvinism and racial prejudice played their part. It must have struck Curtis (Kurt) Bernhardt as ironic that he had been forced to leave Germany for not being German enough, but was ultimately prevented from staying in France because he was too German. Insult, it seemed, was added to injury, and being a Jew meant being recognised not as a German anti-fascist but as a representative of German capitalism, an aggressive and more prosperous competitor. To see the German political emigration in the context of a trade war, in which Germany reacted to Hollywood's attempted colonisation of European markets by pursuing similar tactics towards its European neighbours, notably France, establishes a necessary continuity with the earlier generation of émigrés (Lubitsch, Murnau, Dieterle). It also indicates that political and ideological motives are not always congruent with economic factors, nor are they exactly separable from them: emigration meant political exile and participating in economic exchange. The films themselves are the product of several, perhaps contradictory determinations.

German directors trained at UFA on the whole knew more about the technical side of film-making than their French colleagues. From the mid-20s on, German cameramen had the reputation of being the best in the world. With the coming of the talkies, many French productions hired German soundmen and used technical equipment patented in Germany. Cameramen such as Curt Courant and Eugen Schüfftan, and art directors such as André Andrejew and Alfred Junge (who came to England with Emeric Pressburger) were well respected outside Germany. It could be argued that the German technicians who emigrated to France left a more lasting mark on the industry's professional infrastructure than the directors; contemporary reports, however, often note the raised eyebrows of French film workers at German methods.

'Pommer tried to transpose the working methods of the Berlin era to Paris. There were, for instance, the script conferences which started on the dot and then went on for hours. The seating was strictly hierarchical. HE sat at the head of the table and at the sides, in descending order, everyone else from Director down to propman. One's turn to speak was similarly fixed. For the third meeting, the French appeared with school satchels and slates. Pommer took it well, and shook his head, smiling. When towards six p.m. the conference room was almost empty, Pommer turned to the chief cameraman: "Why are you leaving so soon?" Already at the door, the cameraman turned around: "C'est l'heure de l'apéritif, Monsieur . . . .

As might be expected, many such anecdotes focus on meals and other creature comforts. A typical one made the rounds about Fritz Lang: 'During the shooting of Liliom, Lang attempted to work through the dinner hour, a practice which had elicited a mild protest from his French co-workers. To remind him in a subtle way it was time to stop, one of the propmen followed the practice each day of boiling a saucepan of soup behind the flats stored in the studio, fanning the odorous fumes in Lang's direction. After a few minutes, the director would stop his work and dismiss the crew for lunch.' (Frederick W. Ott, The Films of Fritz Lang, 1979.)

More important than the professionalism of the German film-makers, however, was their ability to transform technical expertise into formal principles of aesthetic meaning. In the French films of the German directors, one can see the beginnings of what in their later Hollywood work is (inadequately) described as 'Expressionist': the use of cinematic mise en scène as an instrument of abstraction; the ability to treat lighting or editing effects, different types of acting and gesture, camera movements or colour schemes as cinematic signifiers in their own right.

Perhaps there is, after all, a stylistic influence that could be seen to link the technical and the aesthetic. One should look, I believe, not to art history or theatre but to the New Photography, photo-reportage and photo-montage, the 'Film und Foto' exhibitions of Stuttgart and Berlin in 1929, organised by the German Werkbund. German still

photography of the late 1920s is marked by the importance given to objects (their texture, their geometrical lines) divorced from social uses and contexts, in order to bring out some vivid but unexpected qualities of abstraction and design. Whether the photograph is of a plant in extreme close-up or of a face, it is the non-organic, non-individualised aspect which the composition highlights.

The New Photography has been criticised on ideological grounds, most trenchantly by Walter Benjamin in The Author as Producer. '[Photography] has become more and more subtle, more and more modern, and the result is that it is now incapable of photographing a tenement or a rubbish heap without transfiguring it. Not to mention a river dam or an electric cable factory: in front of these, photography can now only say "how beautiful" . . . For if it is an economic function of photography to supply the masses, by modish processing, with matter which previously eluded mass consumption—Spring, famous people, foreign countries—then one of its political functions is to renovate the world as it is from the inside, i.e. by modish techniques.' Benjamin was of course perceptive. Today's advertising, colour supplements and fashion photography are the heirs of the New Photography. (As an aside, I might add that this seems to me a direction in which the German influence on Hollywood might be pursued: the 'elevation of objects to the status of persons', as Halliday noted of Sirk, and correspondingly the treatment of people as objects-eroticised, glamorised, on display. Even the perennial references to 'Expressionism' might be 'deconstructed', as having less to do with the darker stirrings of irrationality than with the attraction of the specific and 'special' effects the camera can achieve.)

Certainly, the Weimar cinema was preoccupied with a fetishism of objects, combined with a fetishism of technique. This is the darker side of its genius, the other face of its reputation for abstraction and 'pure cinema'. A pleasure in technique is very evident in the early sound films, as film-makers and technicians strove both to overcome the initial limitations of the equipment and to exploit the narrative effects of the variability of sound source in relation to image. Even in illusionist, non-Brechtian films, such as M, The Blue Angel (Sternberg, 1930), Kameradschaft or The Testament of Dr Mabuse (Lang, 1933), sound is used to generate scenes rather than to illustrate them, because of a rigorous separation of sound from image, for the sake of counterpoint.

At first glance, little of this seems to have entered the films that the émigrés made in France. Yet this is also precisely the point at which they become interesting in their own right. The filmmakers were meeting different production conditions, addressing themselves to a different audience (most of the films were relatively low budget, and therefore destined mainly for the French market)

and encountering a significantly different conception of cinema and its social function. Inevitably, there were changes; but there were also continuities, enough to mark a distinction between the émigré films and those made on similar subjects by the French directors of the 30s. The German cinema which moved to France, and later on to Hollywood, is still characterised by an emphasis on the processes of narration over those of dramatisation-or, rather, by a persistent discrepancy between narrated time and action time. And this double focus becomes the source of a particular kind of pathos—pessimistic and melancholy, but also ironic and cynical.

At the beginning of Carrefour, Charles Vanel's walking stick is photographed in such a way as to catch the light. It becomes dissociated from its bearer and the surroundings; it darts across the screen like a pencil of light, no longer a real object. Here and elsewhere, light and lighting (its intensity or distribution across the frame) becomes, through the precise outline it throws on objects, almost a substitute for editing. Even such a film as Mauvaise Graine (Billy Wilder, 1933), in which the main character is a young man obsessed with motorcars and the main action chases and pursuits and races, shows a similar preoccupation with disjuncture, space and light. Mauvaise Graine opens on a freewheeling, hubcap view of Paris streets, before turning into a typically German father and son melodrama, which in turn shifts into a gangster comedy, a thriller, a couple on the run docu-drama. It ends on the romantic exoticism of a Jean Gabin picture, with a steamer bound for South America and the lovers united only as the siren blows and the last gangway is lifted. With so many genres in play, identification is broken; but they also direct attention to the possibilities of space and light for defining time, as emotional intensity, as the passage from innocence to knowledge and regret, as moments caught in ironic

In films by such directors as Curtis Bernhardt or Frank Wisbar (Anna und Elisabeth, 1933), the camera seems to linger on objects, brush past details, take in a decor which serves no precise narrative function. But the gaze that shapes objects into images is not there to show off production values, as Hollywood films of the period were inclined to do. The camera seems intent, rather, on conveying an essential sense of leave-taking, an awareness that, once noticed, these things will cease to be. What better mood of retrospective regret for the stories of a Curtis Bernhardt, where, in the words of the critic Fritz Göttler, the characters are preoccupied with 'working hard at a past that no longer belongs to them'. From here it is not very far to a persistent theme in films signed by émigré directors, both before and after their departure from Germany: the gradual exposure of an existence as morally or socially false, to whose insufficiency the objects of everyday use bear mute but obstinate witness. One finds a corresponding pathos in Ophuls' films, and it gives resonance to Siodmak's French films, especially *Pièges* (1939) and *Mollenard*.

The well-furnished interiors of Pabst or Ophuls reveal a desire for subtle estrangement, just as the spare and almost empty compositions of Fritz Lang introduce an element of abstraction. In Siodmak's Abschied (1930), which was to have been Ophuls' first film, the family pension which is the scene of the action is a very claustrophobic space, made to appear even more so by an exceptionally mobile and wilfully intrusive camera. At the same time, the emotions the film generates depend on moments of isolation and solitude, carved out of the bustle of activity. The fragility of feeling that makes the film memorable comes from the way significant space is progressively concentrated on a few repeated gestures and privileged objects, notably an engagement ring whose minute and circular inscription of names narrows the whole drama down to a tragically ironic moment of pathos.

This is a cinema built on gesture and hesitation and on the contrasts between substances and their emotional associations, a cinema of close-ups and part objects. In the films of Ophuls and Lang it attains the rigour of a personal style. But even in the work of lesser directors, a sort of metaphoric transfer may operate, by which pictorial detail is charged not with symbolism but rather with the tensions of a setting from which people are absent but where their presence is always implied. An empty plate at dinner, a hat or a chair precisely framed, a lighted cigarette in an ashtray, a letter slit open with too blunt an instrument, can evoke a character through an isolated moment. But in the gaze that falls on them, these objects become fixed in the mind of the spectator as existing not in time but as segments of space.

Such a mise en scène of mute objects or overcharged images demands from the actors a special kind of restraint. Psychological truth lies in nuance and gesture, at times almost divorced from the rest of the character; the actor may be treated rather like some architectural feature whose human substance has flown into the space and decor that surrounds him. Peter Lorre, Fritz Kortner, Emil Jannings are often used like parts of the set, and their physical characteristics are echoed in the objects about them-Lorre's inarticulate roundness in M is taken up by balloons, bulbous street lamps or sack-like shadows; Jannings' craggy shape juts into the light-toned composition of the apartment scenes in Stürme der Leidenschaft (Siodmak, 1931). In the French version, Tumultes, the Jannings part was played by Charles Boyer, and Alain Masson noted that 'the back of the German actor might well have been more massive and therefore more expressive.' Elisabeth Bergner, on the other hand, in the late silent film Fräulein Else (Paul Czinner, 1929), is a nervously restless apparition flitting



Carrefour (Bernhardt, 1938): Charles Vanel, Tania Fedor, Jules Berry.

through the film until her sacrificial suicide, which announces itself by the fact that she puts on a fur coat which makes her seem twice her size.

In France the German directors worked with most of the well-known actors of the time: Jean Gabin, Charles Boyer, Louis Jouvet, Harry Baur, Charles Vanel, Albert Préjean, Danielle Darrieux, Florelle, Edwige Feuillère, Suzy Prim. Trained mainly in the theatre or coming from the music hall revue and the Paris cabaret, the French actor brings to a role not only the carefully distilled observation of social types and the body language of an immediately recognisable milieu, but the sense of an established rapport with an audience. This, more than any exaggerated acting or cabotinage, is what makes French actors 'theatrical': their instinctive awareness that they are performing for an appreciative audience, which may be the other characters in the film or the spectators in the stalls. In the German cinema, the decor and objects become the mirror and repository of reaction and response, not the other characters' faces. This conception of the actor, the difference between an actors'

cinema such as prevailed in France and a cinema of *mise en scène* and space, may well have been the biggest obstacle to critical success for the émigrés' films and explain the sense of unease and disorientation they provoked. The actors did not conform to what was expected of them and seemed miscast; when in fact, as often as not, the German directors used their French players slightly against type, to achieve performances that were anti-psychological and antinaturalist.

It would require a detailed study to begin to interpret these differences as indications of particular national characteristics. But to see Jean Gabin, an actor quintessentially defined by his gestures and the social resonances they evoke, play in French versions of German films such as Chacun sa Chance (Hans Steinhoff, 1931) and Le Tunnel (Bernhardt, 1933) and be asked to emphasise his words with an arm movement that creates a powerful diagonal in the composition but is utterly untypical of Gabin, is to become aware of a particular quality of French films as well as of a mise en scène characteristically German. Other instances show quite clearly that the film-makers were well aware at what points of detail a national audience recognises its heroes. As Fritz Göttler recently put it: 'That in the German version of Le Tunnel Paul Hartmann as mining engineer wears shafted boots at work, but Jean Gabin in the same role wears coarse workshoes, makes up a difference in two kinds of interpretations and ideologies.' A large claim, perhaps, but it is surely in recognising such things that a spectator today will find the pleasure of discovery and the truth that gives the film the status of a document.

In the context of French cinema, the German mise en scène of the late Weimar period must appear cold, artificial, undramatic or morbidly ironic. Except for Renoir, there was a notable reluctance among French film-makers to use the immense potential for abstraction inherent in the film image and in editing. But it was partly because of this abstract dimension in their work that the directors who came to France and ended up in Hollywood were so adaptable. They stand for a cinema that was both romantic and coldly calculating, and one preoccupied with failure, with repetition and return, with closed circles and unresolved conflicts. There was little in their work that could be called 'autobiographical' in a strict sense, which is why an auteurist-thematic approach to their films yields disappointing returns. It was not social realism or political commitment they were after, and one looks in vain for topical references. They came to France and wanted to make films: chameleon-like, they attracted as little attention as possible and blended with the environment (Ophuls shed his umlaut, his scriptwriter Hans Wilhelm called himself Jean Villeme, Kurt became Curtis and Eugen Schüfftan became Eugène Shuftan).

One might accuse them of a certain cold efficiency and taste for virtuosity as an end in itself, perhaps precisely because they had been trained in an art of abstraction and believed in the existence of cinematic form. They were looking at the typical stories and characters of the French cinema, but from outside, experiencing a certain diabolical satisfaction at being able to imitate them so well. Hence a tendency in some of the films to be more French than the French themselves, which is perhaps what rang false at the time because the virtuosity might as easily have seemed merely hollow. Coming from a cinema of abstraction and artifice, even in its realistic or melodramatic mode, the Germans encountered in France a horizon of expectation formed by a much stronger sense of the cinema as part of the other entertainment media and their social context. In Hollywood, with its own cult of professionalism and the glamour of technique, their ironic eroticism of artifice could more successfully pass itself off as emotion, passion and commitment.

Mister Flow (Siodmak, 1936): Fernand Gravey, Louis Jouvet.





# Marker Changes Trains

#### **Terrence Rafferty**

writes on Sans Soleil, Chris Marker's first feature in seven years and winner of the 1983 BFI Film Award

'How do people remember things if they don't film, don't tape?'

—Sans Soleil

Trying to remember Chris Marker's Sans Soleil after seeing it for the first time, a viewer might recall nothing but how he feels at the end-dazed and excited, overwhelmed by a smooth, rapid flow of images and ideas. Or he might recall only vivid, random moments: the face of an African woman and a porcelain cat with one paw raised; an emu on the Ile de France and sleeping passengers on a Japanese train; a carnival in Guinea-Bissau and a volcano erupting in Iceland. And if, as an aide-mémoire, he has taken notes as the film unrolled, his impressions will be more concrete, but perhaps more confused. Did he really manage to take in, during the first ten minutes of the film, an epigraph from Eliot's 'Ash Wednesday', a shot of three children on a road in Iceland in 1965, a short sequence on a train in Hokkaido, shots of women on the Bissagos Islands off West Africa, a prayer for the soul of a lost cat in an animal cemetery outside Tokyo, a dog on a deserted beach, a bar in a rundown district of Tokyo? How did he assimilate, at the same time, the lyrical, aphoristic commentary—in the form of letters from a traveller we never see, read by a woman we don't see, either—and how did he get his bearings in this no-man's-land of documentary images and oblique fiction? Finally, recalling the vertiginous speed of the film's transitions, he suspects that his notes are incomplete, inaccurate, a distorted memory. He'd have to see the film again.

The creation of the need, and the desire, to see things again is part of the

method of Sans Soleil; and also, perhaps, its real subject. What Marker means to communicate to us is the solitude of the film editor at his machinery, his reverie over the footage he's shot (or that has been sent to him by friends), the scenes he watches over and over again. He wants to explain why he returns to Japan, the subject of his 1965 film The Koumiko Mystery; why the images of the emu, the porcelain cat (called maniki neko), the children in Iceland won't go away, why they keep bobbing up in the course of Sans Soleil; how it's possible to see Vertigo nineteen times; how images are replayed as memories, as obsessions, and as the troubled dreams of travellers.

This film has so many showpieces of montage, under such imaginative and varied pretexts—a visit to San Francisco intercut with scenes from Vertigo; a deserted island in the Atlantic where the narrator 'can't believe the images that crop up', shots of Tokyo crowds mixed with the lush Impressionist landscapes of the Ile de France; an imaginary science fiction movie in which images of poverty and desolation are linked by the consciousness of an investigator from the year 4001; a sequence on a Tokyo train in which the sleeping faces of commuters are cut with television images of samurai films, horror movies, erotic entertainment, all attributed to these exhausted travellers as their dreams-so much virtuosity, in fact, that Sans Soleil risks being seen as no more than an exercise in the art of editing, a highly conscious miming of the involuntary processes of memory.

In a sense, it is that. But there's something else in Marker's work, something which distances him even from his own models, like Dziga Vertov and Eisenstein. It's in those qualities that aren't easily transcribed as notes: not simply the juxtaposition of shots but the rhythms of their juxtaposition. The sequences in which disparate times and places are made to correspond have the speed and urgency of passionate argument. Other scenes, like a Tokyo festival with dancers whose hands seem to be telling a story we don't quite understand, are rapt and quiet, as if the editor and commentator were simply transfixed. Sans Soleil is an editor's film, worthy of the Russian masters, but its undulating rhythms—rushing forward, stopping to gaze, following, corresponding across great distances, returning to the same places-are those of a melancholy, obsessed lover.

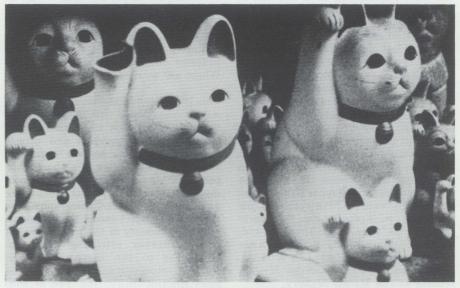
This tone isn't so difficult to identify, but its source—the real object of this love—is more elusive. In Marker's earlier film about Japan, the object was a face, the face of Koumiko Muraoka picked out of the crowd at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. The film-maker follows her, interrogates her in the crowded streets, in the department stores, photographs her in a revolving bar high above Tokyo, the city moving in a slow circle behind her, as if she were merely the focal point of an investigation of Japanese culture. But in the last section of *The Koumiko Mystery*, the focus shifts. The film-maker has

gone back to Paris, having left Koumiko a short questionnaire—he receives her answers on tape. The noises of Tokyo, the bits of radio transmission which have interrupted the soundtrack, have dropped away, leaving only the taped voice of Koumiko to evoke Japan for the distant interrogator.

Visually, the mix is as before: a combination of crowd shots with and without Koumiko, images (ads, samurai films) picked up from Japanese TV, footage of exotic ceremonies and a variety of close-ups, often stills, of Koumiko's face. What has changed is the relationship between the soundtrack and the images: Marker has exchanged the youare-there documentary illusion he started with—the clipped, present-tense narration ('Koumiko Muraoka, secretary, more than twenty years old, less than thirty . . . '), the on-camera interviews—for a tone of retrospection, past-tense narration. The illusion in this last section is that what we see is what Marker is seeing as he listens to Koumiko's tape, the images summoned by her voice and the memory of her face, as if time and distance have turned a job of reporting, the investigation of a culture, into something more intimate and novelistic—the story of a relationship. Koumiko is never made to represent Japan, but she seems, in these passages, to replace it.

The shift from the present tense of documentary to the past tense of reverie isn't just a formal experiment in the relationship of sound and image. It's not playful, like the passage in Letter from Siberia in which a single montage of village life is played three times with three different narrations (communist, capitalist and 'objective'). In Koumiko the effect is haunting, because it embodies the chronic melancholy of the traveller, who's always leaving places and people behind, places which, from a distance, cannot be fully imagined distinct from the consciousness of those who remain. (How can Marker run a sequence of the Tokyo monorail on his moviola without thinking of Koumiko? How can he hear her voice without a picture of the Ginza owl flashing through his mind?) The traveller, better than anyone else, knows that isolation from others means not seeing the same things every day.

We're aware, in the last section of *The Koumiko Mystery*, of the distance Koumiko's disembodied voice has had to travel to find a listener, as she says: 'Always', every day, every night, every morning, always things are happening, all sorts of things . . . It's like a wave of



Above: Sans Soleil: 'Shop windows filled with maniki neko, the cat that salutes.' Below: The Koumiko Mystery.



the sea: when the earth trembles, even if it's from some accident far away, the wave advances, little by little, until it reaches me.' We're aware, as she makes these comments about history that might almost have been scripted by Marker himself (but weren't), as we watch the travelling shot from the front of the monorail train that might almost be what Koumiko is seeing while she speaks (but, of course, isn't), that The Koumiko Mystery has become, in Marker's editing room, the record of a conversation whose intricacy is the reflection of a passion for intimacy—like the coded messages prisoners bang out on the pipes, hoping the sounds will reach each other's cells.

When the unseen protagonist of Sans Soleil, the man with the movie camera, returns to Japan, he finds much of what The Koumiko Mystery found: the Shinbashi locomotive, the Ginza owl, the Dremland amusement park, Westernlooking mannequins in the stores, the same right-wing orator holding forth at the same downtown square, and shop windows filled with maniki neko, the cat that salutes. 'Everything interested him,' says the female narrator, telling his story. He felt, she says, 'joys he had never felt upon returning to a home,' and the shots keep tumbling out, as if someone were rummaging in a box full of jumbled photos, looking for a special picture, looking faster as he gets near the bottom. Koumiko isn't there. Is her face what he's looking for? There's no reason, really, to believe that it is, yet her absence seems to alter Marker's vision of Tokyo: his images, without her face as a focal point, look shallower (more 'oriental', perhaps), with no foreground and background, no perspective, no point of rest, and there are more of them. And this time, treating his own history without a Koumiko as intermediary, he invents a correspondence between the man who films (he names him Sandor Krasna) and the distant woman who, receiving his messages, is made to see the world through his eyes. This time around, without Koumiko, Japan seems more complex, less assimilable. In a sense, Sans Soleil is The Koumiko Mystery remade as The Marker Mystery.

In conventional documentaries, the film-maker is primarily a reporter, answering a questionnaire: How do people live in Siberia? Is Castro's revolution working? How does Israel survive? Marker's earlier films, like Letter from Siberia (1957), Description of a Struggle (1960) and Cuba Si! (1961), may not have given conventional answers, but they remained within the framework of the understood questions. Koumiko, while it plays with the style of reportage only to abandon it, fools us for a while but finally reveals itself: the question, all along, was not 'What is Japan like? but 'Who is Koumiko?' But Sans Soleil seems, rather, to be generating its own questions in the audience, like: Where are we now? Is this a film about Japan? About Guinea-Bissau? Why does he bring up the children in Iceland, here? Was there a project? Or several? Why Vertigo? Why the emu?

These stupid questions (which are also the sort we might ask of a bad, incoherent film), strangely, help pull us along through the movie: we keep following the subject, feeling that it's almost in our grasp—if only the speeding images would slow down a bit, if only those passages that look and sound like summations would allow us to linger before they rush us on to new information, new syntheses. And the stupid questions turn out to be the right ones. Sans Soleil is the diary of a return, a return which inducesnaturally-retrospection, reverie, the need to account for the distance travelled in coming back: a review of notes from other places, beginning with three children in Iceland in 1965 (the year after Koumiko was shot).

These notes—the odd shots saved from Marker's own travels, supplemented by footage sent by friends-are, like all notes, taken spontaneously, for their own sake, or perhaps for the sake of a vague sense that they might someday fit a pattern. Returning to Tokyo, Marker seems to feel as Koumiko did sixteen years earlier when she complained that her head was full of 'things, things, things—all mixed up, without any order'—and he must feel that way again when he's back home editing his footage, reviewing his notes, the cans of film all mixed up, as he tries to analyse and recreate that feeling, with no tape from Tokyo to listen to, just Marker the editor asking questions of Marker the photographer: Why do these shots exist? Where are we now?

This is the way I imagine Marker working on Sans Soleil. His method invites this sort of attempt to evoke him: it's both profoundly personal and utterly detached: the films have a distinctive voice, but it's the voice of a ghost whispering in your ear. The far-flung documentary images of Sans Soleil are assembled as an autobiography-the film has no subject except the consciousness, the memory of the man who shot it-yet Marker attributes this consciousness to the invented 'Sandor Krasna', removes it from himself to a yet more spectral entity. And then he adds further layers of mediation: 'Krasna' himself is often made to attribute his thoughts to others (as, for instance, when he imagines the alien time traveller from 4001 commenting on the twentieth century); and the entire narration is read by another invention, the nameless woman receiving Krasna's

Marker has always had a fondness for complication, subterfuge, disguise: even his name is a pseudonym. For Si j'avais Quatre Dromadaires (1966), a feature-length assembly of still photos taken all over the world between 1955 and 1965, he invented a commentary for three voices, a photographer and two friends. In Le Fond de l'Air est Rouge (1978), a four-hour history of the years 1967-1970 composed of newsreel footage and fragments edited out of Marker's earlier films, he submerges his own voice almost entirely. (In his introduction to the pub-

lished text, Marker confesses to having 'abused' his function as commentator in earlier films, and says that his aim here is 'for once... to return to the spectator, through montage, "his" commentary, that is to say his power'—as an extension, perhaps, of the *cinéma vérité* method of his 1963 documentary on Paris, *Le Joli Mai*, although in that film Marker reserved for himself as commentator the first and the last words.)

In his 1982 book Le Dépays, a photoand-text record of the same trip to Japan which provided the material for Sans Soleil, Marker writes his impressions, not in the first person but in the second-because, he finally admits, he wants 'to establish a distance between the one who, from September 1979 to January 1981, took these photos of Japan, and the one who is writing in Paris in February 1982 . . . One changes, one is never the same, it's necessary to address oneself in the second person for all one's life.' Most of Marker's works are, like Sans Soleil, mixtures of documentary and invention, intimacy and distance, selfrevelation and disguise, but the selfalienating tendency he explains in Le Dépays is perhaps best examined in its most extreme forms: in Marker's only wholly fictional film, the 'photo-novel' La Jetée (1962; released 1964), and in The Train Rolls On (1970), a documentary from the seven-year period in which Marker signed none of his work, functioning as an anonymous member of the film-making collective called SLON.

La Jetée is an elegant and elaborate fiction. Turning to completely imaginary material, he decided to go all the way—not socialist realism, but the real artifice of Borges or Hitchcock. It's a science fiction story, told entirely in still photographs, which begins with a short sequence in which a young boy sees the face of a woman and witnesses a man's murder on the jetty of Orly airport. The story then leaps forward to Paris after a nuclear war: the survivors live underground and some of them, including the now grown-up witness of the opening sequence, have become subjects of time travel experiments, attempts to raid the past and the future for sustenance. On his travels into the past, the hero meets and falls in love with the woman whose face he'd seen at Orly. Finally, attempting to escape from the experimenters, he finds himself back on the jetty, running towards the woman from the past, but followed by an agent from the underground. Just before he is killed, he realises that 'the moment he had witnessed as a child, which had never stopped obsessing him, was the moment of his own death.

The film's brevity (29 minutes), its circular structure and the solemn, highliterary tone of the narration evoke the metaphysical fables of Borges, the dry, conservative Buenos Aires librarian who seems to generate his hermetic fictions entirely out of the experience of reading and writing literature, for whom the past, the present and the future are bound exactly like the pages of a book—not the likeliest model for a well-travelled







Images of women. Top: Sans Soleil. Centre: The Koumiko Mystery, 'the object was a face, the face of Koumiko Muraoka.' Bottom: La Jetée: the woman at Orly.

leftist film-maker, Marker the foreign correspondent. But the spirit of Borges' fiction isn't so alien to the man who edits the footage and comments on it—Marker at home, in a dark room with a moviola, like Borges' 'Funes the Memorious', who remembers everything as he sits in his sunless shack—or to the man who includes in his published scripts the texts of commentaries for 'imaginary films'

called America Dreams ('Thus America dreams. The prisoner in his prison, the traveller in his photos... the man in his memories') and Soy Mexico, documentaries existing only in the mind, whose commentaries precede not just the editing, but even the shooting of the film.

In 1962, when he shot *La Jetée*, Marker wasn't travelling. He was in his home city of Paris: in that year, he also

shot (with Pierre Lhomme) and edited Le Joli Mai, a documentary portrait of the city. This is one of his most straightforward films, composed primarily of oncamera interviews and coverage of current events, but it's also a film whose commentary (sparing though it is) seems to be reaching towards fiction, a more fantastic framework, an alien perspective on familiar landscapes. Le Joli Mai's first half assumes a detached, lofty vantage point—this section is called 'A Prayer from the Eiffel Tower'-and its second-half narration imagines a city haunted by 'the return of Fantômas', the mysterious criminal of Louis Feuillade's silent serials, here transformed into a metaphor for Parisians' fears and uncertainties near the end of the Algerian war. And at the end of Le Joli Mai, Marker shows us a prison in the heart of Paris, and his commentary asks us to imagine a prisoner who has had no part in the daily life that the film has chronicled, and asks us, finally, to assume the prisoner's perspective upon his release, as he looks into the faces of ordinary Parisians and sees only their tense unhappiness, the features of another kind of prisoner.

La Jetée-whose vision of Paris after the apocalypse begins with a shot of the Eiffel Tower and then descends to an underground prison-seems almost a pendant to Le Joli Mai, part of the same attempt to achieve a perspective on a moment of transition between a traumatic past and an unforeseeable future. Again, it's a prisoner's perspective, an eerie evocation of a solitude filled only by images from the past. In La Jetée, the imagination looks like an escape, a means of survival; but the experimenters can't seem to find the imaginative roads to the future, and the past turns out to be a plan that has already been fulfilled. The images from the jetty (a setting which implies flight, though we never actually see a shot of a plane taking off) have a different meaning the second time the hero sees them: after his long return journey of the imagination, the scene he witnessed as a child and experienced only as a shock finally comes back to him with all the details filled in (the faces of the murderer and the victim). He has closed the circle, taken full possession of the obsessive image from his past-but it's just as if he'd committed a slow suicide in his cell.

The movie's ambivalence about the value of imagination is, I think, a reflection of Marker's mixed feelings about creating imaginative fiction on film. Stuck in his home city at a moment in history too unsettled and contradictory to be seen clearly, and having decided that fiction (and science fiction, at that) was the right response, Marker seems to have discovered that fiction film-making can be a process of deepening isolation—the solitude of the scriptwriter repeated as the solitude of the editor. It's a departure from his documentaries, in which he skips the scripting stage and goes straight to the shooting, and also from his 'imaginary films' like America Dreams, for which he writes the script

but leaves out the shooting and the editing.

If, as I've suggested, Marker's documentaries are a kind of interrogation, a correspondence between the man who films-spontaneously-and the man who edits-analytically, reflectively-then what correspondence can take place in a scripted film like La Jetée, whose shooting is following a plan? What he does, in his editing room, is reduce the filmed footage to stills, in the attempt to return the story to the moment of its conception (but with all the details filled in), to return it to the writer who, in solitude, imagined it. He gives it back, not as a moving picture, but as a truly imaginary film: a storyboard. By eliminating movement, the illusion of immediacy, Marker makes a film in which the present seems not to exist. The power of La Jetée is that he makes us feel the full poignancy of its absence.

Perhaps the reason why Marker didn't repeat La Jetée's experiment in fiction was that it was too successful: creating a film entirely out of his imagination seems to have brought him close to the weary detachment of the story film's lonely artisan, Hitchcock, the master storyboarder who often claimed that his interest in a film was exhausted in the planning, before the shooting began. Vertigo is clearly an important film for Marker, but its significance, as Sans Soleil illustrates, is that of a powerful memory, not a model of the film-maker's activity. We can see something closer to Marker's true model-a favourite myth—in the SLON documentary The Train Rolls On, a film which isn't his solitary creation, but the product of a collective. It's not difficult, though, to imagine Marker's part in this short profile of the Soviet film-maker Alexander Medvedkin: the beginning, a montage of stock footage (the October revolution, cavalrymen, Lenin's funeral) and stills (Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov and his brother Mikhail Kaufman, the futurist art of El Lissitzky), is a reverent but graceful evocation of the period, and it has Marker's stamp on it. The early years of the revolution are imagined here as a kind of golden age for both society and the arts, and a time, besides, when film was the most important art because it served as the witness, the record of social change. 'First, the eye,' says the voice-over commentary. Then the cinema, which prints the look.

After this lyrical prologue, Medvedkin, now an old man, tells his story about the cinema train he took through Russia in 1932. We see, as he tells it, stills of railroad cars equipped with editing machines, a lab and a projection room-everything needed to shoot films, develop them, edit them and project them, all on the run. Medvedkin and his crew filmed farmers at work, showed the footage to the people they'd filmed, and led discussions on the efficacy of their methods; they did the same in factories. 'The cinema,' says Medvedkin, 'could be a great and forceful weapon, reconstructing not just factories, but the world.' It's hard to imagine a more stirring image for revo-



The Train Rolls On: Soviet cameramen.

lutionary film-makers, a train that travels everywhere, filming and changing the world as it goes—a film-making process that's nearly immediate, the distance between shooting and editing reduced to almost nothing. In a final romantic burst, the narrator links Medvedkin's train to 'everything that's advancing and moving—history, the cinema . . . The biggest mistake one could make would be to believe that it had come to a halt.'

Medvedkin's train, Marker's ideal, may have been rolling in the fervent, hopeful days of the late 60s and early 70s, but from the evidence of Sans Soleil, it seems to have stopped before it reached the 80s. 'Tokyo is a city crisscrossed by trains,' Marker tells us, but the trains we see are vehicles of dreams: the passengers file in from underground shopping malls, and the train's smooth movement lulls them into a sleep filled with samurai and ghosts and beautiful women from TV ads. (The narrator imagines 'a single film made of the dreams of people on trains.') When the ride is over, and the crowds spill up from underground into the January light, they seem to have acquired an otherworldly beauty—whether because they've been refreshed by their images or because they have, at last, been released from them is impossible to say.

But the images Marker sees when he dreams at his moviola are of those things that were 'advancing and moving' years earlier, like the revolution in Guinea-Bissau, but have since been arrested. The one that keeps returning is the face of an African woman whose eyes meet the gaze of his camera for exactly 1/24 of a second, the duration of a single frame of film. Or he sees again the 'image of happiness' he began with, the blond Icelandic children on the road, who have 'grafted themselves into' a sequence from Tokyo showing a Shinto blessing on the debris left after a celebration, a blessing which is 'a ceremony for everything that's been left behind.' The last time he sees the blond children, he holds the shot for its full duration, including the bit he'd edited out earlier, when the image starts to tremble, the camera blown by the wind. And this time, he follows that shot with a friend's footage of the volcanic eruption that wiped out the town in Iceland five years after: it is, he says, like watching the destruction of his memories.

Marker's return to Tokyo in Sans

Soleil, like the time-traveller's return to the jetty, produces a more detailed image, one which includes everything that has passed in between. He finds, again, the huge advertisements, the mannequins, the statuary, the flood of TV imagery, but he also finds local festivals and a wide variety of commemorative celebrations: for lost cats; the war dead; broken dolls. He finds a letter from a princess of the Heian period who speaks of the 'contemplation of the tiniest things . . . things that quicken the heart', and a man with a video synthesizer who plays with the traumatic images of history (the Second World War, Vietnam), distorting them into abstract, colourful shapes, 'drawing profiles of what's gone.' Japan, this time, seems one huge festival of commemoration, a precise reflection of the mood of the traveller who's left so many places, people, political movements and past selves behind, but kept bits of them on film, notes which have lost their immediacy, things which have stopped moving but inspire in him the desire to reanimate them at the editing table—the only way available to him to commemorate the things that have quickened his heart.

When the traveller sits, at the end of the film, before Hayao Yamaneko's video synthesizer (an EMS Spectre) and watches the images of Sans Soleil in vivid outline, lingering on a beautiful distortion of the African woman's fleeting look, as the woman on the soundtrack wonders Will there be a last letter?", he seems to have arrived at another alien perspective, as if the accelerating, circular movement of self-interrogation had finally spun him off into orbit—and from this distance (as if from the year 4001), his own images, rendered in the crude, liquid beauty of synthesized video, look like the cave paintings of animals in Lascaux, still pictures that are moving because we sense the movement of the mind and the hand that made them, in commemoration.

This isn't, perhaps, what Marker had in mind in the early 70s: this movement isn't the steady, effective rolling of Medvedkin's train, but a high-speed, crisscrossing motion, trains and planes zipping frantically through the world and leaving, the first time, only traces of their motion, after-images on the retina when we close our eyes. In Sans Soleil—if we return to it a second time—the lines resolve themselves into an image, just visible across the distance of time and fiction, a ghostly face.



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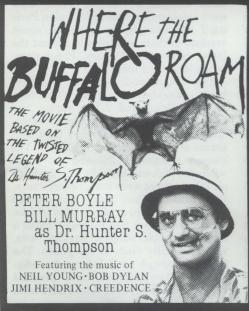
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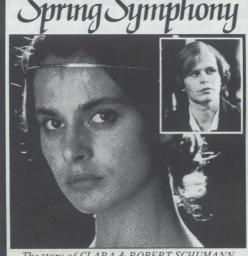
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ON RELEASE





# Dreyfus and Documeníary

**Stephen Bottomore** 

It is late summer. A famous couple have just been reunited after he has suffered an ordeal on an island off the South American continent. They are surrounded by photographers and cameramen who are going to any lengths to get them on film. Complaints of persecution by photography abound in the British press. Film versions of their story are planned... The year is 1899. Captain Alfred Dreyfus has just returned to France from Devil's Island to face his second trial for treason. He has met his wife for the first time in almost five years.

The Dreyfus Affair, as it came to be called, was the biggest news story of its time. It culminated in the second trial, at which point it was headline news all over the world. As the Affair developed so did the cinema, and the way in which this news story was filmed and presented on screen is a microcosm of the origins of

the documentary film.

The Dreyfus Affair began in 1894, when the French military discovered that someone had been passing defence secrets to the Germans. This was a time of great tension in Franco-German relations and it was felt to be vital that a culprit be found. Suspicion centred on Alfred Dreyfus, a captain on the General Staff. He was arrested in October 1894, tried in secret by a military tribunal and sentenced to life imprisonment on the infamous Devil's Island, near French Guyana. The following years were marked by cover-ups and official connivance at what, it became clear, was an unjust verdict. Colonel Picquart of the Intelligence Department found evidence of Dreyfus' innocence, but this was suppressed by the military. Examination of the handwriting on the secret document seemed to implicate another officer, Colonel Esterhazy, but although Esterhazy was put before a court martial, it was Picquart who was eventually

By this time France had become torn into two opposed and sometimes violent camps: those who believed that Dreyfus was innocent, and had become a scapegoat because he was Jewish, and those,

frequently anti-semitic, who refused to countenance any questioning of military justice. In 1898 Zola assailed the government with his famous 'J'accuse' article, and from this point the Dreyfusards began to gain the upper hand. When Colonel Henry of the Intelligence Department admitted forging evidence against Dreyfus and committed suicide, the authorities were forced to order a new trial. Though Dreyfus was again found guilty, this was a verdict merely to save military face; he was soon afterwards pardoned and in 1906 the verdict was fully reversed.

From the beginning of the Affair, photography (if only of the stills variety) had caused controversy. After Dreyfus was found guilty in 1894 he was publicly degraded, stripped of his insignia, his sword broken, and finally he was photographed in that state. The photograph was publicly exhibited, which led to objections, especially in Britain, on the grounds of taste. The *British Journal of Photography* in an article entitled 'Photography as a Humiliator' complained, 'It is the first time we have heard of photography being used under circumstances that would be so painfully discreditable as those quoted.' (18 January 1895)

In 1895 the cinema was born and film shows were soon springing up all over the world. For the first couple of years no films about Dreyfus were made for the obvious reason that he was several thousand miles away on Devil's Island. But at least one man saw a clever way round this. In 1898 one of Lumière's travelling cameramen. Francis Doublier, was making and showing films in the Jewish districts of Southern Russia, where interest in the Dreyfus Affair was high. Doublier was asked why he hadn't any films of the events. By the time he reached the city of Zhitomir he had ingeniously remedied the situation with some stock footage: 'We got out a film of some French officers marching. We pointed to one of the officers and said, "There marches Dreyfus." We showed an old picture of a French public building, and said, "There is the Palais

de Justice where Dreyfus was courtmartialled." We showed a little boat going out to a warship, and shouted, "See! They are taking him to Devil's Island." Then we showed a picture of a little island, and said, "There is where they took him! Devil's Island." The customers shed tears."

Doublier said that he made 'quite a bit of money' out of this early foray into montage. Even so, there were some awkward questions about Dreyfus' height and the lack of foliage on Devil's Island. Skilful commentary explained most of these doubts away, until one day a little old man asked him directly if it was a genuine filming of the case. 'I assured him that it was. The little old man then pointed out that the case had taken place in 1894, just one year before cameras were available. I then confessed my deception, and told him I had shown the pictures because business had been poor and we needed the money. Suffice it to say, I never showed L'Affaire Dreyfus again.' (Image, June 1956)

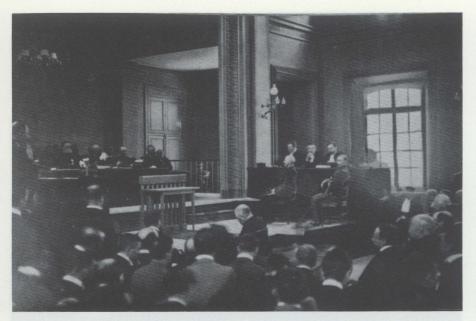
Given the worldwide interest in the Dreyfus Affair, it is possible, indeed likely, that other showmen perpetrated similar deceptions. Be that as it may, events in the Affair were changing in a way that would dramatically affect the cinema's coverage of it, for in July 1899 Dreyfus returned to France to be tried

for the second time.

Interest from the press was, to say the least, intense. It is estimated that at the retrial, which was held in the Breton town of Rennes, there were over 300 journalists from all parts of Europe. Figaro alone had a dozen stenographers working in shifts to ensure that not a word of the trial went unreported. Extra telegraph lines were laid between Rennes and Paris to carry the press despatches (all going via the Government Telegraph Bureau, where they were occasionally censored), and in Paris itself the newspapers employed street vendors in their hundreds to cry out the latest news from Rennes. Press circulation increased massively.

The visual media enjoyed a similar boom: weeklies like the Illustrated London News and L'Illustration had been publishing photographs extensively from the mid-90s and they sent teams of photographers to Rennes. The cinema companies followed suit, and when Dreyfus was brought into the town on 1 July, there were lenses everywhere. Unfortunately, their quarry was whisked into prison before a single shot of him could be obtained. But they soon found a more accessible subject: Dreyfus' wife, who paid daily visits to the prison. The Daily Telegraph on 8 July wrote indignantly: 'Photographers have pursued her without mercy ever since I have been here. Especially obtrusive was an elderly gentleman with a monumental outfit of material, which followed him on a handcart. Every day he tried to secure an advantageous position in the miller's

<sup>\*</sup>There are various versions of this anecdote. This one is from the New York World Telegram, 23 October 1935.



Above: Dreyfus' second trial at Rennes. From *Black and White*, 12 August 1899.

Below: the courtroom as reconstructed by Méliès.



yard opposite the prison... It appears that he was getting up views for a cinematograph.' The British Journal of Photography, in an article entitled 'Persecuted by Photography', said: 'To be snap-shotted against one's will by hand cameras is bad enough, but being cinematographed is infinitely worse. Handcamera pictures, as a rule, are confined to private collections. Not so, however, with cinematographs, they are taken for exhibition at places of public entertainment. Madame Dreyfus has our sympathy.'

The Amateur Photographer recommended a counterattack, advising Madame Dreyfus to shield her face with a parasol, and even suggesting that her friends should 'spoil the picture by standing close to and in front of the lens.' In fact a simpler remedy was at hand: Madame Dreyfus complained and the authorities varied the time of her visits each day so that she usually avoided the snapping shutters. But the photographers had their eyes on the real prey: Dreyfus himself. For a month in July he was confined in Rennes prison before his

trial could start. The authorities, realising how a picture of the lonely Dreyfus in prison could arouse public sympathy, were determined that he should be kept out of sight. They even put wooden shutters over his cell window. One photographer, a certain Léon Bouët of Paris, managed to sidestep all these precautions. He discovered that at a certain hour each morning Dreyfus was taken out into the prison yard for exercise. Bouët gained access to a tanner's establishment overlooking the yard and got the picture he wanted: 'Captain Dreyfus is taking his morning walk in the yard, preceded and followed by a soldier. His features are not visible, but his attitude and gait, drooping and bent, might belong to an aged man.' (Daily Telegraph, 8 July 1899)

To obtain a still photograph was one thing; a moving picture was quite another. The equipment was much bigger, heavier and noisier, quite unsuited to a necessarily clandestine operation. Nevertheless, the French head of the Biograph and Mutoscope Company decided to try. His name was Monsieur Orde, and his adventure is described in a remarkable article in the *Penny Pictorial Magazine*, September 1899, entitled 'A mutoscopic romance'. The writer, Alfred Angus, reported: 'I have it on the highest authority that no more difficult feat has ever been undertaken by the syndicate controlling the biograph and mutoscope rights.'

M Orde's intention was to follow Bouët's example: he found a vacant house opposite the prison and persuaded the landlord to let him rent it, but when he went to inspect the property, '... He raced up the stairs to the top floor front. Horror! He could not even see the door out of which Dreyfus and his jailers must emerge! Ah! The roof! He got out upon the landing . . . But they found, after much searching, that no skylight existed, and that they must force an entrance through the tiles if they would get out into the open.' But M Orde found that even the roof was too low. 'At the highest point he could only catch a glimpse of the headgear of the guards as they moved about in the yard below.' So he decided that the only thing to be done was to 'erect a scaffolding at least ten feet high upon the highest portion



This was done, `... And M Orde was repaid for all his trouble by stepping on to the platform supported by the scaffolding, and finding that it commanded a splendid view of the entire yard... At an early hour next morning the camera... was placed in position... M Orde was resting in one of the rooms below... when a loud shout of dismay summoned him to the roof... Horror of horrors!... The prison authorities had at last discovered, owing, no doubt, to the presence of the camera on the lofty platform, the purpose of the scaffolding, and were now

\*Such photographic platforms seem to have caught on. A month later, the Standard reports, a wily businessman was hiring one to photographers which commanded a view of Dreyfus being taken into the courthouse—the authorities ordered him to desist.

erecting a tarpaulin screen in time to prevent Dreyfus being photographed . . . But M Orde did not despair. He, too, erected a tarpaulin screen, leaving only the small space necessary for the muzzle

of the operating camera.'

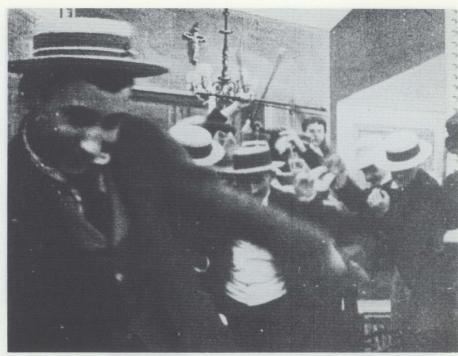
Then M Orde waited. 'After a week, the prison authorities evidently thought they had tired out the enemy, and removed the tarpaulin. Watching eagerly, the operators in an hour or two noticed some slight commotion in the yard, and presently . . . there emerged, under guard, the man they had waited so long to focus. Whir! went the apparatus, and photographic films . . . were being turned out. Something, however, must have occurred . . . to attract the guard possibly the camera screen was agitated by the excited movements of the operators. At any rate, Dreyfus was soon hurried in through the other door.' But M Orde had succeeded and the resulting film was shown to 'astonished and mystified' audiences at the Palace Theatre in London.

A single shot of a man walking in a distant yard was unlikely to satisfy audiences for long. They were interested in more than mere current news events, for the Dreyfus Affair had become by this time a well-known saga: his degradation, followed by Devil's Island, followed by Henry's suicide, etc. What was needed was a development of Doublier's montage, a reconstruction of events.

Such reconstructions were pioneered by Georges Méliès in 1897, with his dramatisations of the then current Greco-Turkish war (see my article in Sight and Sound, Autumn 1980). He continued this technique with what were probably two reconstructions of the 1897 Frontier War in India: Fighting in the Streets of India and Attack on an English Blockhouse. The following year he tackled the Spanish American war with episodes set in Cuba and the Philippines. All these films were made with the dispassionate skill of a showman trying to exploit current events, but his next reconstruction was different.

Méliès was already the sort of person who was likely to be on the side of Dreyfus; he was a freethinker and vaguely anti-establishment (he had already made two films which parodied established religion), but he was really won over to the cause by his cousin Adolphe, a passionate Dreyfusard. Méliès' granddaughter writes that Georges 'first followed new developments in the Dreyfus case with interest, then with indignation, finally with passion. For a man who believed deeply in justice his course of action was clearhe must save Dreyfus.' And the best way he could do this, he believed, was to make a film.

He started work on it in August 1899, while the trial was still in progress. The eventual film was composed of twelve episodes, chronicling the affair from its beginning (strictly speaking it was a series of films, each of which was sold separately, thus making it the first serial in film history):



The fight of the journalists in Méliès' film. Frame still: Barry Salt.

- 1. Arrest of Dreyfus (1894).
- Degradation of Dreyfus—this episode may have been filmed later, probably to drive home Méliès' sympathy for Dreyfus.
- 3. Devil's Island—within the palisade.
- 4. Dreyfus put in irons.
- 5. Suicide of Colonel Henry (August 1898).
- 6. Dreyfus disembarking at Quiberon on the Britanny coast.
- 7. Dreyfus sees his wife and lawyers in prison at Rennes.
- 8. Attempted assassination of Dreyfus' lawyer, M Labori, at the start of the trial.
- 9. Fight between pro- and anti-Dreyfus journalists in the court.
- 10 and 11. The trial.
- 12. Dreyfus departs from the court to prison.

As a whole, it was Méliès' longest film to date (almost 15 minutes) and was totally unlike anything else he had done in its emphasis on realism. Normally realism was the last thing to concern Méliès but, perhaps because for the first time he was making a polemical film, he went to a lot of trouble to get the details right. According to Georges Sadoul, several scenes were based on news pictures from the weekly illustrated papers, and Méliès may even have visited the trial during his holiday that year on Jersey to see things for himself. Even if unnaturalistic painted backdrops are present in some scenes, the costumes are absolutely correct and the actors are made up to match the real people they represent. The man playing Dreyfus was an ironworker who bore a close resemblance to the original. (Unfortunately he had a tooth extracted halfway through the filming, and the resultant swelling meant that he could only be shot on one profile.) The scene of the fight of the journalists emphasises the uncharacteristic naturalism in this film: the action is clearly improvised, something that the punctilious Méliès would never normally do. Also, the actors move past the camera in depth rather than his typical serried layers going across camera.

Only a few days after Méliès shot his film, another Dreyfus reconstruction was being made by Pathé. It was in six parts-two scenes of Colonel Henry including his suicide, a scene of Dreyfus in his cell (still existing), and three scenes of the trial.\* Comparing what is left of the two versions today, Pathé's seems rather more convincing; the sets, though still in the form of backdrops, are not so decorated and fussy. Despite their efforts at naturalism, the films are not convincing by today's standards. Nevertheless they were 'swallowed whole by European audiences', according to Jay Leyda. A report in Photographic News (8 December 1899) said: 'The whole thing ... was extremely well done, and the only fault we could find with the display was that it was not Dreyfus, Labori, Demange [Dreyfus' two lawyers] and the rest that we were looking at, but wellrehearsed impersonators of those interesting people. But where is this new kind of photo-faking to stop?'

This writer was not the only one to be concerned about this new type of 'convincing fake'; the French authorities were extremely disturbed by such realism, tied as it was to the political hot potato of the Dreyfus case. It made events seem much closer, and therefore more likely to inflame the passions of an audience. And when Méliès' film was first shown this is indeed what happened: his granddaughter writes that there were pitched battles in the cinema. The police had to be called to separate

\*The French film archive think one of these, Entrance of the Council of War (still existing), is part of the Méliès film, but a description of the Pathé version in the British Journal of Photography, 29 September 1899, matches this section closely.

Dreyfusards and anti-Dreyfusards who were throwing things at each other and were about to smash the seats.' The situation became so inflamed that the government decided to ban the film totally; apparently the first instance of film censorship for political reasons. And the censorship didn't stop with Méliès' film: it was followed by a general ban on the making and showing of any film about the Affair. The law against showing Dreyfus films was only lifted in 1950 and it was not until 1974 that Giscard d'Estaing allowed a film to be made about the case.

The French were almost equally sensitive about the showing of Dreyfus films abroad. A set destined for the Empire Theatre, South Shields, was 'confiscated by the French Government', according to the British Journal of Photography (15 September 1899), which thought this was going a bit far: 'The case might possibly be different if the living pictures could depict what was said, and the way it was said, by some of the Army witnesses in the case-some of the generals, for example.' But it concluded that perhaps 'it is as well the films were confiscated', because the airing of such contentious issues might stir up the political passions of the audience.

This timid attitude seems to have been common: in the October issue of the Optical Magic Lantern Journal, there is an article entitled, 'Dreyfusonia Unscreened—a Warning' in which the author argues that these films are better not shown because they would not 'fit in' to an evening of ordinary, uncontroversial films and might excite undesirable political emotions: 'No lecturer surely would care to have his oration subjected to the hisses and groans that undoubtedly would accompany it ... Where will come the good of going over ground that is full of scoundrelism, forgery, conspiracy, flagrant bias, lies and hypocrisy . . . Sketching the life of "Dreyfus" without introducing the horrors that have surrounded it is an impossibility, and for that reason I would guard lanterndom against such a nauseous subject...Let us hope... that "Dreyfus" will remain as far as concerns lanterndom unscreened.'

The difference in approach is interesting. Across the Channel the films were banned for outright political reasons. In Britain these reasons did not exist; the Dreyfus Affair had virtually no effect on British political life. Nevertheless there was strong support for Dreyfus in Britain: he was the little man up against the all-powerful French establishment, and films of him might well have caused 'hisses and groans' from an audience. But the largely middle-class British showmen clearly thought that rousing any kind of political feelings in their audience was not so much dangerous as just inappropriate and rather vulgar.

There was no question in Britain of overt censorship; the films in many areas simply remained 'unscreened'. One feels that, in this way, little has changed in British attitudes in eighty-odd years.

After the key period of 1899, other versions of the Affair were made. The Dreyfus Affair (1907, Pathé) was unlike its predecessors in that it showed from the first scene that Esterhazy, not Dreyfus, was the guilty man (because of the French ban, it had to be edited abroad and was shown mainly in the USA). Later came Dreyfus (1930, Germany); Dreyfus (1931, GB); The Life of Emile Zola (1937, USA); I Accuse (1957,

In the late nineteenth century the pioneers of the cinema were in general unsure of the future of this invention and what it could be used for. At the same time the Dreyfus Affair was engaging the attention of the world, and it is perhaps inevitable that films should have been attempted. But this coming together of medium and event had more importance than the filming of any other news story of the time, for it demonstrated the varied ways of presenting real events on screen and the problems that went with them. Invasion of privacy, fakery, censorship-these issues would return again and again in the history of factual cinema. In a very real sense, with the Dreyfus Affair we see the origins of the documentary.



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#### AMERICAN INDEPENDENTS

#### The World of Tomorrow

Media Study New York



THE WORLD OF TOMORROW looks back at the great New York World's Fair of 1939-40, and the more than 40-million people who glimpsed the future there. The film uses home movies, films, cartoons, photographs, and other vintage graphics to evoke that moment when the World stood poised between black and white and color, between the Great Depression and the Second World War.

Produced and Directed by Tom Johnson and Lance Bird 78 minutes Color B&W 1984

#### Sundae In New York

A Film by Jimmy Picker
A Motionpicker Production
Academy Award 1983
Best Animated Short



New York's irrepressible Mayor, Ed Koch, singing a special rendition of "New York, New York," "stars" in this amusing and energetic clay animation extravaganza. other famous "figures", such as Frank Sinatra, Woody Allen, and Rodney Dangerfield all appear. This gallery of comedic caricatures creates an exuberant four minutes that delights audiences of all ages.

"...an outrageously funny clay animation." Benson, L.A. Times

4 minutes Color 1984

#### He Makes Me Feel Like Dancin'

Edgar J. Scherick Associates Academy Award 1983 Best Documentary Feature



The excitement of school children learning how to dance is captured through the teaching process of Jacques d'Amboise, the principal dancer of the New York City Ballet. The film begins with auditions, follows Jacques and his students through rehearsals, and culminates with the "Event of the Year" where over 1,000 children participate.

Produced and Directed by Emile Ardolino 51 minutes Color 1984

#### You Are Free

Academy Award Nomination Documentary Short 1983



The sorrow of the Nazi concentration camps becomes a human reality in this film which focuses on interviews with five people who took part in the liberation. Intercut with the thoughts and feelings of four Allied soldiers and one camp prisoner is powerful archival footage of holocaust realities.

"...defies imagination," Herbert Luft, *The Jewish Times* A film by Ilene Landis and Dea Brokman

20 minutes Color 1983

#### **BRITISH SHORT FILMS**

#### A Shocking Accident

A Flamingo Picture

Academy Award 1982 Best Short Film



From the short story, A SHOCKING ACCIDENT by Graham Greene, an English school boy learns that his father has been killed in a bizarre accident. His friends tease him and years later his aunt still relishes the tale. Only when he meets a girl who understands, can he shake off this terrible memory.

Produced by Christine Oestreicher Directed by James Scott 25 minutes Color 1983

#### Couples and Robbers

Ladd Company Academy Award Nomination Short Film 1981



Two couples, one with all the riches dreams are made, and one with only dreams and schemes, are unexpectedly brought together by the plotting of the poorer couple. This charming and sophisticated comedy reveals much about contemporary values. "Witty and memorable, masterfully directed and performed." Sheila Benson, *L.A. Times*Written and directed by

Clare Peploe
Produced by C. Oestreicher
29 minutes Color 1984

#### The Fetch It

A Film by James Hill



THE FETCH IT is a whimsical short story of a writer who is kept from his work by the constant interruptions of his playful dog, Bumble. As his master loses interest in the time-worn game of "fetch-the-ball", Bumble heightens the contest, threatening his position as man's best friend.

18 minutes Color 1984

#### The Spice of Wickedness

Elkador Films



In a sly and sophisticated story of the age-old battle between the sexes, this eighteenth century period film shows how a beautiful and aristocratic wife outwits her wandering husband and gains more than his love in the bargain.

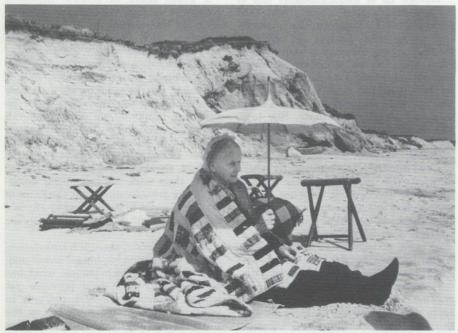
Produced by Sondra Orosz Directed by Elka Tupiak

24 minutes Color 1984

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The Bostonians: Miss Birdseye (Jessica Tandy).

#### The ivory tower

The Bostonians/Gilbert Adair

With the credit-titles of The Bostonians (Curzon) materialising over images of an organist playing 'America' in the loft of a church, I think: Ah, could this be an indication from James Ivory to his detractors that, as of now, he is prepared to pull all the stops out? For though his films have enjoyed widespread admiration, that admiration has been countered, in some quarters, by the reproach that they suffer from a certain, not easily definable, lack of passion, of violence-in a word, of punch. On the other hand, none of Ivory's devotees has ever engaged with this hostility or endeavoured to confound it (possibly because the whole oeuvre impresses them instead as self-evident in its ingratiating brilliance). Before addressing myself to The Bostonians, then, I should like briefly to propose a theory to account for both these dispositions.

We (in film criticism) have yet to emerge from what might be called the post-auteurist era. Yet, though the auteurist critics performed a valuable service in prizing the audiovisual, rather than literary, status of the medium, and though they were right to champion such authentically innate, 'born' filmmakers as Hawks, Hitchcock, Lang, Sternberg, Ford and even Sirk over mere cinematic taxidermists (whose very names, if cited, would reek of mothballs on the page), what they tended to overlook was the fact that an enlightened section of the audience quite reasonably sought more from the Seventh Art than idiosyncratic, multilayered, deceptively modest, beautifully crafted-oh, and all the qualifiers you care to add!-Westerns or thrillers or melodramas. Quite

reasonably, I repeat, these outcasts from Hollywood's populist ritual would nose around for movies whose overt intellectual discourse bore an analogical relation to the novels they were reading, the plays, operas and ballets they were seeing, the paintings they admired. Which is why 'lay' intellectuals have traditionally appeared so obtuse about the cinema. Why their allegiance has been extended over the years to a smattering of solemn, outwardly imposing works and withheld from a host of cheerfully unrepentant genre movies which look a whole lot subtler today. For them, American movies were something you grew out of, like comic-books. They were wrong (perhaps), but who can blame them?

In any event, auteurists have made no attempt to analyse this disaffection, just as many of them have failed to see in Ivory one of the rare English-speaking film-makers (he is too cosmopolitan to be considered strictly American; certainly, too 'East Coast' for Hollywood) to have embarked upon a career in mainstream cinema in which the intelligence of his films functions confidently at the level of their primary, no less than their latent, discourse, and is therefore no longer the exclusive property of his exegetes. In its urbane way, such an attitude is almost radical. Not for him the ivory tower of fastidious elitism; his is, were one to be facetious, Ivory Towers, an old-established (rather than old-fashioned) brownstone hotel in Manhattan—quiet, elegant, civilised, overlooking the park, its human proportions in sharp contrast to all those Hiltons and Holiday Inns which scrape the neighbouring skyline.

The Bostonians is probably his best, no doubt his most moving work. On the surface, first of all. He possesses two qualities at least that not even his detractors would deny him: an incomparable gift for period reconstruction and a positive genius for casting. The question of filming the past is essentially one of dosage: too little, and the spectator is distracted by thoughts of budget; too much (i.e. too many signs: parasols, vintage cars, etc), and the director risks falling into the seductive trap of belle-imagisme (as one says bellelettrisme). Ivory's, like the baby bear's bowl of porridge, is just right. As filmed by Walter Lassally, the dark mahogany interiors, the leafy, sunlit Boston streets, the summer house on Cape Cod. with the wind calmly turning the pages of the sea, constitute both a stylised landscape and an inhabited one.

A similar just-rightness, as it were, animates the cast, which has been selected with a care and discrimination far removed from the complacently arbitrary matchmaking (e.g. Redford & Fonda, Belmondo & Adjani) of so much contemporary cinema. Vanessa Redgrave, though a shade too old for her role, invests it with a radiant melancholy that reminds one of Katharine Hepburn circa Lean's Summer Madness; Christopher Reeve's performance is vastly superior to his previous crack at one of James' charming upstarts (in a recent theatrical revival of The Aspern Papers); and the supporting players—from Jessica Tandy as the doyenne of feminist emancipation to Wesley Addy as a bargain-basement Mephistopheles, from Nancy Marchand as a cool Beekman Place dowager to Linda Hunt as the disabused voice of reason-are well-nigh flawless. As for Verena, the fresh young spellbinder torn between her commitment to the women's movement and the assiduous courtship of a Mississippi gentleman, Madeleine Potter is so very right that any other actress would have seemed an imposter: entirely credible as an orator, she contrives to be, as a lover, simultaneously shrewd and vulnerable, a velvet fist in a velvet glove.

The scene, as they say, is set. As in much of this director's work (of late, Hullabaloo Over Georgie and Bonnie's Pictures, Jane Austen in Manhattan. Quartet and Heat and Dust-all of them, like The Bostonians, filmed from screenplays by Ruth Prawer Jhabvala), the central conflict arises from the imposition of a choice on the protagonist, a choice between two cultures, two ideologies or two individuals. What gives Verena's choice its particularly poignant resonance is the rigorous, almost algebraic interdependence of the individual and the ideological: she can have Olive and the clubby solidarity of the feminist cause, or Basil and a presumably lopsided, male-dominated marriage, she cannot have both; nor can the equation be re-set in different terms. And a

peculiar difficulty facing Ivory was how to reconcile the novel's conclusion—Verena defecting from the movement in favour of her Southern beau—with our current feminist (or feminist-influenced) priorities. Here, if nowhere else, his solution ought to remove that dubious label of literary director' from him once and for all.

Consider the two sides of The Bostonians' equation. Ivory has taken a malicious pleasure in juxtaposing a conventionally binary, tete-à-tete (or sexe-à-sexe) relationship with a more diffracted, more evenly diffused form of sexuality: what might be described as an eroticised camaraderie; and, as was already the case with the underrated Jane Austen, it is for the spectator to pass judgment-if so inclined. Where Basil's wooing of Verena is concerned, the crucial factor is not those overly famous and irrelevant 'Jamesian ambiguities' (irrelevant, as the cinema, for all its versatility, is incapable of formulating any of James' obsessive 'so to speak's or 'could it be?'s) but the fact that the film's narrative does not miss a single step.

Though he is unquestionably one of life's charmers, Basil never pretends to be attracted to Verena's ideas, as distinct from her person; he remains throughout an obstinately sexist interloper who, notwithstanding his looks and physique (and let's do Reeve justice by forgetting his most notorious role), has his work cut out for him. Verena does not abjectly capitulate. She toys, like Beatrice with Benedick, with this fascinating recusant until-such is the common course of dalliances so lightly entered into-she has him exactly where he wants her. But what makes the film unique is the way it ascribes to the suffragettes an amorous dimension of their own, a Courbet-like physicality, which divests Olive's love for Verena of any 'taint' of lesbianism in the narrow sense. Its most graceful, affecting, most sheerly enviable scenes are of this tender, flirtatious phalanstery of women, reading the classics of feminism over each other's shoulders or strolling arm in arm along the beach, posing affectionately for a group snapshot or squealing with delight at a fireworks display.

I wrote above of Ivory's 'malicious pleasure': in fact, that phrase sets too little by the extraordinary clarity, the legibility, with which he and Jhabvala interlace two so subtly differentiated modes of existence with two so diametrically opposed ethical principles. And, if anything can be said to disclose their own sympathies in the affair, it is the fact that, unlike James (and pulling all the stops out, after a fashion), they are prepared to leave the final word with Olive. Taking Verena's place on the podium, speaking at first in a faltering voice, then with an increasing assurance, she demonstrates that the flame of feminism is not to be dimmed by any one defection from the cause, however prestigious.

The Bostonians, then, is a translation, not an illustration, of James' novel; and, as with all such translations, what has been brought forth is a perverse yet wholly autonomous hybrid, not only in relation to the fiction itself but to the ultimate 'identity' of its author, or auteur, Henry James Ivory, you might say.

#### The Thrifty Pop man

Comfort and Joy/Tom Milne

Like people as much as Bill Forsyth seems to, and there is always the danger that you will end up falling into the Ealing trap of making cosily patronising little comedies about their foibles. After the Keatonesque purity of gag in That Sinking Feeling and the exquisitely earthbound poetic fantasy of Gregory's Girl, there was certainly an alarming touch of the pawky regionals about Local Hero.

Equally certainly, Comfort and Joy (Columbia-EMI-Warner) sails even closer to Ealing comedy formula with its tale of a Glaswegian disc jockey (Bill Paterson) who uncovers an ice-cream war, a sort of internecine Mafia struggle within one Italian family—the fish-and-chip shoppers have moved in on the ice-cream vendors' territory—which the disc jockey eventually resolves both peaceably and profitably by proposing a collaboration on a new Chinese recipe for ice-cream fritters.

Designed as a parody of the Hollywood gangster movie, much of this is undeniably funny and stamped with the surrealistic fantasy that springs from the fact that Forsyth's characters, no matter how stereotyped, remain blithely unaware of the rules governing behaviour for their species. Two masked hoodlums armed with crowbars, for instance, leap out of a car like classic protection racketeers and proceed to smash up an icecream van while terrorising the driver. One of them pauses, quaintly, to ask the watching disc jockey for his autograph and to put in a listener's request for a

Mantovani record. But the real delight comes when the disc jockey looks at his car next morning to find—a daintily refined warning to keep his mouth shut about what he saw—the upholstery studded with stickily up-ended ice-cream cones and looking like some outlandish action painting.

Like Renoir, Forsyth recognises no villains. All his characters have their reasons, and all of them, you feel, have lives beyond the immediate confines of their roles in the film. So when, in one of

its most enchanting scenes, the disc jockey turned investigative reporter is finally summoned by the ice-cream boss—Jimmy Cagney heading for a showdown with Edward G. Robinson—the encounter logically finds him in a dingy local caff where he is invited to tea. Anybody might have thought that up. But only Forsyth would have imagined the prissy little comedy of manners that arises over the last two Kunzle cakes, one of which must be graciously reserved for the guest as a special delicacy.

If all this isn't quite funny enough to sustain the comedy, perhaps it was never intended to, and it may be that Forsyth has been too hurriedly pigeon-



Comfort and Joy: A brother's anger (C. P. Grogan, left).

holed as a funnyman. All the earlier films had their fleeting moments of epiphany, moments when a sort of magic breaks through the humdrum carapace of everyday life to reveal something else. It is there vestigially in That Sinking Feeling, where the boy reluctantly bludgeoned into a drag role in the robbery ends up playing it with relish, evidently finding a welcome release from his frustrations in the masquerade. It is very much there in Gregory's Girl, in the ceremonial rite whereby Gregory, disappointed in love, is passed from priestess to priestess in what seems a cruel joke until the chain unites him, if not with the girl of his dreams, at least with the girl who has dreamed of him. And in Local Hero, magic is everywhere, in the stars that bring fortune, in the sea that brings love, in the Scottish mists that bring people clarity of vision about their mixed-up lives.

Comfort and Joy is different in that, for the first time, magic fails. It is Christmas as the film begins, the season of loving and giving, and a man is keeping a woman under observation in a department store. Not, as one immediately assumes, a store detective about to pounce on the shoplifter, but our disc jockey nervously anticipating disaster as his girlfriend Maddy (Eleanor David) freely indulges her shoplifting fancies. 'You'll be the death of me, Maddy,' he prophesies as they drive away, begging her to desist and furthermore not to smoke in the car. A request she promptly denies by conjuring a vast, ornate and clearly purloined table lighter from somewhere about her person.

Almost immediately, despite his distress, she starts making preparations to leave him, as though tacitly declaring that she cannot go on living with someone so intent (albeit unconsciously) on clipping her wings. When we next see him, he is alone, dismal and disconsolate in a flat stripped of furnishings, all of which her arts had supplied, and it is as though a light had gone out of his life along with the table lamps. There was something unreal about the relationship, a friend tells him consolingly, insisting that her departure is really a blessing since it leaves him free to start afresh. 'Everything here is you,' the friend adds encouragingly, looking appraisingly at the bleakly empty flat.

Sadly, he proves to be right, and the memory of Maddy is left to linger (a tribute to Eleanor David's performance) as something magical that might have been but never really was, since the disc jockey never even managed to declare his love for her except, while drunk, to someone else. Meanwhile, a dead man in all but name (an equally marvellous performance by Paterson), the disc jockey is haunted by dreams of a Maddy who has come back, by intimations of love and domesticity he encounters in the streets, by envy of the friend who has it all (love, family and home), furiously fighting

back by channelling all his energies into finding another avenue of meaning to his life.

Tired of being a clown who spins discs interspersed with trivial chatter and silly advertising jingles for something called 'Thrifty Pops', he determines to turn serious and make a documentary film. Out of the dark, sad disenchantment of his disappointment in love he conjures a dangerous and sad city of the imagination from his environment (superbly shot by Chris Menges). Fearlessly he tracks down and exposes the nightmare of brutality, conspiracy and extortion, only to end up with a clownish bag of ice-cream fritters, no different in kind from his despised Thrifty Pops

except that they will earn him more since he has a third interest in the deal.

Undoubtedly less at ease in its skin than Forsyth's earlier films, Comfort and Joy deserves at least as much attention in that it reaches further. The highest compliment I can pay it is to say that it is uncannily reminiscent of Bob Rafelson's marvellous King of Marvin Gardens as a painfully funny exploration of spiritual bankruptcy. With the difference that where Rafelson's hero was a man living inside his head because he couldn't come to terms with the world, Forsyth's disc jockey is a man who functions beautifully outside but has no idea how to get inside to see what is going on in there.



The Home and the World: Bimala passes into the outer apartments.

#### Nikhil, Bimala and Sandip

The Home and the World/Andrew Robinson

With the possible exception of Devi, which dipped into the dark springs of orthodox Hindu superstition, the longawaited The Home and the World (Artificial Eye) is, in its glowing magnificence and austerity of spirit, Satyajit Ray's most demanding film. Comparisons are difficult, because Ray consciously avoids repetition in his work. But the new film is bound to invite comparison with Charulata (1964). Both are based on Rabindranath Tagore, both are set in an unorthodox zamindar's palace, both deal with a love triangle in which the woman emerges from traditional behaviour into unfulfilled sadness. Yet the films differ fundamentally in content, tone and style. Charulata is at root a simple tale of unrequited love. The Home and the World (Ghare-Baire) is a tragedy: it belongs to a world of greater complexity, shorn of easy romance, its characters forced to confront the wider effects of their own limitations. The

vision is deeper, more mature and darker.

In one sense, *The Home and the World*, set in 1907, takes up where *Charulata* left off. The liberal husband in 1879 published a newspaper and dabbled in politics as an obsessive hobby. Through him we hear about large events, but they cast only a background shadow over the story. In the new film, the outside world intrudes upon the inner with increasing urgency, until the characters quite suddenly find themselves overtaken. The way they respond, and their ultimate inability to control their lives, is what absorbs Ray.

The historical background to the story and the powerful emotions aroused (comparable, in some respects, to the fight for Irish independence) are of first importance, and Ray works hard to clarify a context likely to be unfamiliar to Western audiences. Bengal in 1907 was in turmoil, the early phase of nationalist fervour having been sparked

off by Curzon's arrogant announcement in 1905 that Bengal would be partitioned. The Hindu-led 'swadeshi' movement opposed the British: it celebrated Indian values and tried to drive out 'bideshi' (foreign) ideas and then to boycott foreign goods. The poor, mostly Muslims, could not afford to cease trading in the cheaper foreign goods, and rioting broke out between Hindus and Muslims, an expression of pent-up grievances and undoubtedly abetted by the British desire to divide and rule the Bengalis. In 1908-9 the movement was suppressed, after some terrorist attacks, but bombings and assassinations were to continue right up to 1947. A strong, poignant tradition of youthful idealism lured towards revolutionary violence is evident today in Bengal. Ray's unsentimental examination of this state of mind was the theme of The Adversary, made in 1971 around the worst period of recent violence in Calcutta, though his central character was, typically, not the revolutionary but his indecisive, thoughtful brother.

The living hopes and frustrations of a nation are, therefore, a subliminal presence throughout Ray's evocation of the period, and it is from this perspective that Tagore's story needs to be approached, and in particular the awkward, largely unsympathetic revolutionary, Sandip. Tagore's novel, published in Bengali in 1915 during a period of terrorism and in English in 1919, the year Tagore returned his knighthood in protest at the Amritsar massacre, roused immediate controversy for its critical portrait of a somewhat cowardly, narcissistic, luxury-loving leader. Later, the Marxist critic Georg Lukacs was to savage it as a 'petit bourgeois yarn of the shoddiest kind' that contained 'a contemptible caricature of Gandhi' (sic).

Tagore, while admiring certain swadeshi leaders and writing some fine patriotic songs, one of which is sung by Sandip in the film, defended his novel as a comment on a specific, unhealthy and significant aspect of the movement. Yet he remains open to a charge of implausibility: the novel's Sandip is something of an abstract villain filled with rhetorical wind. In writing his screenplay, Ray was well aware of this problem: his Sandip is a weak-willed, impulsive but intelligent operator, with that Bengali mixture of pride bordering on arrogance and impracticality. At one moment he persuasively proclaims the importance of swadeshi to Bimala, the wife of his old college friend, the zamindar Nikhil, and the next declares, 'To hell with swadeshi, I'll spend the rest of my life chatting to you.' At which Bimala sensibly bursts out laughing. Despite the disaster which Sandip has deliberately caused, Nikhil can still finally feel sorry for him. 'With all his gifts, he couldn't really accomplish anything.' This is the note of tragic futility that runs through the film.

Soumitra Chatterjee, who plays Sandip, was originally cast, some twenty years ago when the project was considered, as Nikhil. His classic Bengali good looks, as well as his previous roles for Ray, might suggest the part of the consciencestricken zamindar. But Sandip must be able to entrance a crowd or a woman with his speech, and Soumitra Chatterjee's fine, sonorous control of soliloquy in Bengali perhaps explains why Ray cast him against the grain. Not everyone, however, will feel this charm; some may share E. M. Forster's reaction to Sandip as a 'West Kensington babu'. The more comprehensible character, because more rational and westernised in outlook, is of course Nikhil (Victor Banerjee), yet like the husband in Charulata, he too has his naivety and insensitivity. After ten years of marriage, Nikhil persuades Bimala to leave her secluded quarters and meet another man, Sandip, to test the strength of her love for him. To identify with Nikhil, to feel his frozen anguish, requires from a Western audience a difficult imaginative leap into an alien set of values.



Sandip and Bimala.

Bimala, played with fine alertness by Swatilekha Chatterjee, is a woman wrenched in a few weeks from centuriesold, though (as Nikhil points out) not necessarily ancient Indian seclusion, through fire into the calm ashes of widowhood. When she finally emerges beside her husband, in a lyrical passage in slightly slow motion, across the palace bridge from the inner to the outer apartments, and speaks for the first time to Sandip, it is difficult for us to grasp the enormity of her act. Sandip's silence and then his words of astonishment convey quite a lot, but Bimala only smiles with tentative determination. She is, as Ray once wrote of the oriental mind, calm without and fire within. Given her estrangement from Nikhil and her tentative exploration of a new relationship with another man, her continuing reticence is natural; the ready play of emotion on Charu's face, that so delighted the world, would be out of place here. When in the end she does give her all, gripping the mirror and reflecting on her unstoppable, appalling catastrophe, it is a moment of searing intensity, without a note of music.

It is the psychology of these three characters, and to a lesser extent that of Nikhil's honourable schoolmaster friend, his affectionate and slightly jealous widowed sister-in-law and Sandip's hotblooded student-turned-follower (all first-rate performances), that flows so eloquently from the film, supported by exciting and subtle music which is among Ray's very best. As Ray himself said last year: 'This movement from a certain state of character to another state of character, this total inner change, fascinates me most.' By an ironic and complex twist, the word 'intuition', spoken at some time by each of the three principals, is always in English, the language of the rulers. It is as if true intuition, based on a genuine understanding of each other, will always elude them. And it is the ever present need for self-discovery, and the relationship of that to love in its various guises, which is the true theme of the film. In a moment of honesty, Sandip tells Bimala, 'The truth is that I need politics as much as I need you.' She agrees. Neither of them has yet begun to understand the falsity of both desires. And Nikhil, who has transcended such wanting, has in the process lost sight of the meaning of his life.

The Home and the World is a sombre film, reflecting Ray's pessimism about the fate of India and the soul of man. It is a meditation on 'the roots of what is perhaps modern India's greatest tragedy,' to quote a Bengali historian, 'the failure to intermingle the currents of national and social discontent into a single anticolonial and anti-feudal revolution.' There is, however, some light amid the gloom. Hearing in the night outside the palace the first shots heralding the riot in which he will courageously die, Nikhil heavily climbs the stairs to his bedroom. He stands alone beside the window. As he reflects on his failure, we see him distanced, reflected in a mirror, a mere shadow against the window frame and the luminous blue rectangle of light from the night sky, with one of his beautiful cushions glowing richly red in the light of a candle. Despite the sense of foreboding hanging over the story, one gets a sense of harmony and peace caught in Tagore's own words. 'All at once, my heart was full with the thought that my eternal love is steadfastly waiting for me through the ages . . . Through many a life, in many a mirror, have I seen her image-broken mirrors, crooked mirrors, dusty mirrors. Whenever I have sought to make the mirror my very own, and shut it up within my box, I have lost sight of the image. But what of that? What have I to do with the mirror, or even the image?'

#### Perform and tell

#### The Hit and The Company of Wolves/Richard Combs

On a hillside bathed in what seems to be a minatory sunset glow, a white-suited figure climbs in dream-like motion to a shrine in wrought-iron filigree. Immediately afterwards, a sleek black car is observed from above as it executes a circular, equally sinister motion in the forecourt of what seems to be a block of English council flats; the group of men in this and a following car, brandishing guns, could be either policemen or hoodlums. These are the first two sequences of The Hit (Palace), and between them they more or less sum up the story, although what is most immediately striking about them is the way they carefully work outside story, in terms of what seems to be. The apocalyptic atmosphere, the metaphorical visuals (that car, from above, looks as predatory as a shark), even the disorienting switch from the Mediterranean to England (once this would have been a dreary signal of international co-production), are all credentials of the neo-thriller, whose metaphysical menace is not limited by plot. The Hit is Point Blank out of Performance.

What the men have come to collect at the flats is Willie (Terence Stamp), East End gang man turned Crown witness, who is being held in protective custody until his day in court, when his cheerful testimony sends a dockful of his erstwhile colleagues to prison. 'Protective custody' itself is a sulphurous huis clos, in which Willie's habit of reading at the table particularly provokes his contemptuous guardians (that Willie is already a great reader, before going into enforced exile, is the first of some confusing explanations of plot and character). As he leaves court after giving evidence, a high camera swoops down on him (with some additional, wide-angle distortion), while his betrayed mates rise to bellow a chorus of 'We'll Meet Again'. Cut to a bloated Mediterranean sun, and Willie bicycling in his timeless Spanish exile, the scholar in the East End wide boy evidently having blossomed, reading matter stirring in the breeze at his villa window with a sumptuous view beyond (a Renaissance composition that is also part of the equipment of the neo-thriller, contemplation snuggling beside action). But the thieves' chorus was no idle threat, and Willie is soon on his way to Paris and retribution with the veteran hit man Braddock (John Hurt) and his nervous sidekick Myron (Tim Roth).

As for the film's very opening shot—the figure on the hillside—it is nearly the end before this is 'placed' in the story. The figure is Braddock, climbing the hill in what must actually be dawn light, just before executing an assignment that has become more difficult



The Hit: Willie (Terence Stamp).

than he expected, in a way that outrages everybody else's expectations. This delayed delivery system—giving an audience a glimpse of a scene before they can know what to make of it-recalls not just Performance but Nicolas Roeg in general. And in a curious way, The Hit, produced by Jeremy Thomas, who also produced Roeg's Bad Timing and Eureka. is a film which could be ascribed to a producer following an (absent) director whom he in turn may have influenced. Willie is like many a Roeg hero, whimsically tempting fate because he has either lost all faith, gained a superior one, or is just playing for time. He is also as mystical a jester as the hero of Thomas' pre-Roeg film, The Shout. Unfortunately, inside Peter Prince's script about this death trip as a game of metaphysical bluff, a more conventional thriller is trying to get out.

Willie's various roles—as cocky supergrass, as seraphic spiritualist, as teasing game player, as well-practised 'mouth' in any role—are over-written but unrelated, as though a crisp, well-enunciated TV play had been superimposed on more diabolically shaded material. When Myron at one point angrily compares Willie to Braddock, the hint of killer and victim as doppelgängers, the interpenetrability of all three personalities, comes as a bit of a surprise, being unprepared for and undeveloped by the rest of the film. Perhaps the wrong co-ordinates have been set up for Willie: a picture of John Lennon on his villa wall, a cascade of books falling in slow motion as his kidnappers depart, is Roegian in a general way, but what Willie needs is more specific reference, Melville's Confidence Man, perhaps, or Conrad's Secret Sharer. It would be unfair to accuse director Stephen Frears of having attempted to make something too clear-cut, on TV lines, out of what should have a devilish

ambiguity. With cameraman Chris Menges, he has created some extraordinary images, Renaissance vistas mingling with the hyper-realist, superclarity itself becoming a baleful ambiguity. But within this, the film's narrative gears keep slipping, as if a neo-thriller were still connected to some rather ancient and creaky machinery.

The problem of The Hit, in a way, is an excess of sophistication: its selfawareness has unhelpfully complicated its narrative options. The Company of Wolves, which is not only being distributed but has been made by Palace Pictures, their début in production, is something of a companion-piece. It attempts a reading of the horror film through images that combine detachment with a visual sumptuousness. (It also features Terence Stamp, in a brief, uncredited role as the Prince of Darkness.) But what subverts the playfulness here is rather the reverse of The Hit's narrative clutter. It is an odd kind of naivety, the sense that the makers have moved into archetypal movie territory with quite specific revisionary intentions but no idea of how to make them work in movie terms. Written by novelist Angela Carter from two of her own short stories, and directed by Neil Jordan, another novelist with one previous film (Angel) which strikingly transplanted the thriller to his native Ireland, The Company of Wolves almost looks as if it has bypassed the cinema.

This might seem a perverse criticism, since what is on screen could hardly have been effected anywhere else. It features the most graphic transformations yet of man into wolf: the human coil being bloodily shuffled off; glistening new tendons and musculature forming; then the lupine bone structure popping out of the old envelope. But 'graphic' here can also become a selfdefeating literalness, and this merges with the narrative's deadening literary quality. What should have been a riot of storytelling, of dream tales opening into old wives' tales and then into reinterpreted fairy-tales like Little Red Riding Hood, tends towards a stilted explication of the content of all these stories. The framing story, or motif, features the pubescent, sleeping Rosaleen (Sarah Patterson), her lips aglisten with her older sister's red lipstick, a copy of My Weekly rustling on her pillow, her dolls and teddies also stirring in the first breeze from Rosaleen's nascent sexual consciousness. This evolves into a full-fledged dream, a magical forest of the id, where she and her parents live in a medieval/fairy-tale village with wolves all around, and Granny (Angela Lansbury) warns of the dangers of 'straying from the path'.

Various tales spring from this setting, all of them born from a nugget of Grannylore: the worst wolves are those who are hairy inside; men whose eyebrows meet

in the middle are incipiently wolfish in nature; the bastard progeny of clergymen born on Christmas day (and whose eyebrows meet in the middle) are certain to be claimed by the Devil. All Granny's sayings, of course, are encoded precepts of sexual dread and taboo, and the film is most suggestive when they remain encoded, in chats of nursery-rhyme cosiness round a roaring fire as Granny knits Rosaleen her flamboyant red riding hood of purest virgin wool and passes on her legacy of folk paranoia. But away from the fireside, the film's illustrative

episodes elaborate on this subtext without embodying it in a very persuasive text. For a film about folk tales and the spellbinding power of narrative, The Company of Wolves has little storytelling nous. In particular, Rosaleen's parents (David Warner and Tusse Silberg) are reduced to the plainest linking role through the ages. The problem in the end in writing about The Company of Wolves-which may not be a problem in lapping up its sensuous visuals—is that it is a film that has written its own

#### Sharing the limelight

Broadway Danny Rose/John Pym

The prisoners of A Nous la Liberté were set to making wooden horses. Woody Allen's films, it occurs to me, are not unlike these toys. Spotted, personal, engaging: the human byproducts of a soulless system, in this instance the treadmill of the American movie industry. But, you might protest, all in recent years much the same. They have appeared, to be sure, with admirable regularity: which other New York film-maker, let alone one who gleefully scorns the West Coast, works with such beavering regularity, has held the same loyal, first-rate technical team? But is there something-anything-new to write about them? Is there not, deep down, something deadly and formulaic about the slight storylines? Has not the weedy little fellow trespassed on our patience, begged for our sympathy just once too often? Is he not suffocatingly selfregarding?

Broadway Danny Rose (Columbia-EMI-Warner) lays itself on the block. In the Carnegie Delicatessen in Manhattan (this is no other place but Allenland) a group of old-time comics sit at a table (another identifying stamp-and all at once resistance weakens) and reminisce about Danny Rose, not exactly Broadway and the Catskill resorts' greatest stand-up performer, now turned theatrical agent, but undoubtedly the one who has attracted the greatest stories. And what we are about to hear is the greatest

Danny Rose story.

From film critic, through cult filmmaker and hit TV writer, to the legendary 'Chameleon Man', friend of Eugene O'Neill, baseball star, one who could sit on the same platform as Adolf Hitler, Allen the writer-director has steadily upgraded the status of those whom Allen the actor has been called upon to impersonate. As time passed, these characters found worldly success and its attendant anxieties. But Danny Rose is not quite like this: fame having eluded him, he is now keen for the success of others. He is an agent renowned for bulldog loyalty to a blind xylophone-player; the keeper of a

bird, Peewee, which picks out 'September Song'; a lady who plays the glasses and smiles and smiles. His hair is thinning, his sports jacket is fiercely checkered, his patter goes on and on ('May I interject a statement at this juncture . . . ' this when the potential booker has thrown up his hands for what seems like the last time). In Zelig, Woody Allen appeared sometimes to be about to fade clean out of the documentary clips; in Broadway Danny Rose he has faded into the mythical anecdotes of his peers; and the old-timers are played by real oldtimers. Those who can see nothing in his humour will point to this, perhaps, as solipsism of Chaplinesque proportions.

Nothing tickles Woody Allen's fancy like parody, and by now he has parodied practically every type of movie. This is his Mafia picture. Gordon Willis' black and white photography has at times an appropriately rough edge; there is, certainly, none of the lush romantic softness of Manhattan. The love interest is Tina Vitale, a gangster's widow, who eats nails for breakfast and keeps her sunglasses on for most of the running time (eighty-four minutes: editor, Susan E. Morse). As in Stardust Memories, we are in Diane Arbus territory: there is a droop-eyed hitman; a pair of funny peculiar twins; a poetic Romeo who drinks iodine. The overlay, however, is nothing if not traditional: the premise (our hero ends up with Tina, his best client's girl); the star appearances (Milton Berle, as himself, smiles with bemused benevolence on the shrewd comedian who has made good); the kidding real-life references (Tina, incarnated with gumchewing relish by Mia Farrow, gazes at a picture of Frank Sinatra, the actress' former husband, while her current husband, Woody Allen, remarks that he, Danny Rose, is not quite visible in the photograph).

But there is a difference, a small difference, and one that in the recent pictures has been growing plainer. The neuroses are dropping away. It's no longer: look at me, the pathetic duffer,

the incompetent lover, the coward who will save a bully the trouble by stepping on his own spectacles. Allen's current characters are each in his own fumbling manner more than half at peace with themselves: and none more so than Danny Rose. There are people worse off than himself, namely his clients; and he's genuinely pleased to look after them, to stand them a Thanksgiving dinner, albeit frozen turkey slices. He has an honourable profession; there's no time to fret about his single state.

Allen has always yielded to his leading ladies, and they have blossomed miraculously. Mia Farrow is no exception. The plot finds Danny despatched as go-between to collect Tina, the adored girlfriend and good-luck charm of Lou Canova, a crooner, married and about to ride the nostalgia wave to undreamed of success. Tina bursts upon the screen as she opens the door to Danny; she is abusing the soft-centred Lou down the phone; the tirade builds and develops into an elaborate, classic scene ('May I interject at this . . . '). Mia Farrow goes on to graduate with deadpan honours, a fit companion in the firmament for the imperishable Diane Keaton.

This is not surprising. For the first time, however, Woody Allen allows a fellow-actor an equal share of the limelight. This is not to say he has not in the past been supported by some grand performances: but this time he genuinely yields centre stage. Nick Apollo Forte, a professional singer (the director saw his face on a record sleeve), plays Lou with delightful, practised ease: he has an offscreen existence, is as interesting, in a bulky, childish way, as the frantic agent who scampers after him, sobers him up, chooses his shirts, eats with his children.

Allen does not stop here. He allows others their space too. To escape from the Mob, who have trussed him up with Tina, having mistaken him for her lover, Danny protects Lou by naming as the 'real' lover an inoffensive comedian, Barney Dunn, whom he believes out of harm's way entertaining on a cruise ship. The booking, however, was cancelled and Barney ends in hospital where Danny, now ditched by the ingrate Lou, pays a call and offers to cover his expenses. A small scene: but Barney becomes important. He's not one of the decorative grotesques, or a guest appearance; he has a life, a so-so career, real broken limbs. It's no surprise when he's next seen enjoying himself at the Thanksgiving dinner.

These are perhaps only small notations. There is really nothing new to record. Woody Allen is still retailing that stooped frame, worried look, that inimitable intake of breath and hurt silence when misfortune strikes. He remains that most cherishable of companions, a comedian sure of his audience, confidently firing on all cylinders. Long may the horses come off the production line.

#### The world was yours

#### Once Upon a Time in America/Chris Peachment

The key to it all is in the clock. In the opening sequences of Once Upon a Time in America (Columbia-EMI-Warner), Noodles (Robert De Niro) returns to Fat Moe's speakeasy, on the run from three assassins apparently hired to avenge his double cross of the gang (although none of this information has yet been vouchsafed by the film); his quarry is a set of keys to the left luggage locker where the gang keep their money. They are hidden in a grandfather clock. Moreover, the object which first brings Noodles and Max (James Woods) together in their life of crime is a stolen pocketwatch which passes between them as both criminal target and talisman

Obviously time is not a new theme for Sergio Leone; there was the musical fobwatch in For a Few Dollars More, reminder of rape and revenge and final signal for the shootout; and Once Upon a Time in the West, littered with handless clocks, had as its plot's mainspring a mystery which was only finally revealed in the last few seconds of a dying man's vision. But the constant adventure of Leone's Westerns was really one of space; those vast and resonant landscapes, likened to a Rothko canvas, from which figures materialised as if literally born from the soil. After space, however, Leone has turned to time.

In strictly chronological terms, Once Upon a Time in America divides into three phases: 1923, when the adolescent Max and Noodles form their Jewish gang on the Lower East Side: 1933, the gang, having made a killing out of Prohibition, is destroyed during an attempted bank raid, apparently betrayed to the police by Noodles; 1968, after thirty-five years spent hiding in Buffalo, Noodles is summoned to New York by a mystery note, and discovers that Max has become a successful politician called Secretary Bailey, and has also had a son by Deborah (Elizabeth McGovern), the only woman Noodles ever loved. But it is only from the perspective of 1968 that Noodles can piece together what happened to the gang, to his betrayal, and to his love. The final despairing weight of history which bears down on Noodles' shoulders as an old man only makes full and immediate tragic sense if the audience is allowed the same back-and-forth connections which hindsight (and cinema) allows.

It is all the more ironic that the version of the film which Americans themselves see is robbed of its greatest strength, since studio bosses decided to cut it and rearrange it into strictly chronological sequence. (Europe is seeing the original version.) The rearrangement must have proved more difficult than it sounds, for many of the film's

most startling coups are pulled off with audacious jump-cuts. To cite just two examples: in 1933 Noodles exits through a station doorway, decorated with a period advertising collage, en route to his exile: he returns almost immediately through the same doorway, now decorated 60s style with a large apple, as a greying, hunched old man. (McCartney's Yesterday' can be faintly heard.) Later, he is anxiously scurrying down a dark New York street clutching a suitcase of money (whose 'meaning' is yet to be revealed). The hand that swoops to relieve him of it turns out to belong to the Max of thirty-five years ago, helping Noodles on his release from prison.

The sense of suspense by a process of postponement, in which Leone so successfully trades, is first intimated in the opening sequences, in which Noodles is being pursued by avenging killers, after he has betrayed the gang. He is plagued by a telephone bell which will not stop ringing, connected in his mind with his phone call to the police. Not even lifting the receiver will stop the jangling. The noise is revealed to be part of a recurrent nightmare, induced by visits to a Chinese shadow puppet theatre and its opium den. The nightmare invades his whole life, infects him with the guilt of having betrayed his only friend, and reduces him to a point where not even the final revelations can move him to action.

Perhaps the film's greatest departure from the conventions of the genre, to which it is both commentator and support, lies in the character of Noodles. Most screen gangsters seem to be men of near-superhuman abilities, whose goals are exactly the same as everyone else's (fame, money and beautiful lovers), but whose pursuit of them is rather more energetic than that of people still stuck in the rut of legality. Noodles however is resoundingly ordinary. As Deborah tells him, when they are still adolescent, she will never love him because he will only ever be a 'two-bit punk'. The display of success that he later arranges to woo her, at a vast and empty hotel complete with all its staff, orchestra and private beach, is vulgar in its excess (while still retaining its romantic Gatsby glamour). She leaves him that night to continue her career in Hollywood, probably because he didn't know which wine to order.

When he has finally unravelled the mystery of Max's re-emergence as Secretary Bailey, he cannot even bring himself to avenge the triple cross which Max has pulled on him (an assured future for Max, thirty-five years out in the cold of unbearable guilt for Noodles, and the theft of Deborah's affections). Too worn out even to accede to Max's request that Noodles shoot him, he retreats to the shadows outside and witnesses Max commit suicide in the most off-hand and disgusting way, in a garbage grindertruck. As several convertibles full of carousing revellers pass by, oblivious to the scene, to the faint strains of 'God Bless America', the spectre of wealth and enormous waste is again raised from The Great Gatsby. One also thinks of 'The world is yours' from Scarface (just another of the many films which this one 'quotes'). For Noodles is finally left with absolutely nothing but the memory of an opium-tainted smile at the shadows of puppets on a wall. It's not a new observation, but cinema is no more than this.  $\Box$ 



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#### **BOOK REVIEWS**

#### D. W.

D.W. GRIFFITH An American Life by Richard Schickel Pavilion/£15 00

Arriving on the heels of Donald Spoto's Hitchcock and Richard Koszarski's Stroheim, Richard Schickel's massive biography of Griffith manages to steer a middle course between the compulsive narrative thrust of the former and the more scholarly negotiation of diverse hypotheses pursued by the latter. Grappling with a life and personality that surprisingly proves to be no less private and elusive than Hitchcock's, Schickel confidently leads the reader through over six hundred pages of text without ever resorting to Spoto's questionable tactic of baiting one's interest with the promise of scandalous revelations. And if his scholarship in certain areas raises more questions than Koszarski's-see the helpful remarks of Griffith scholar Tom Gunning in the June American Film, particularly about the Biograph period—he can still be credited with plausibly ploughing his way through an avalanche of contradictory and incomplete data.

Schickel's task is, of course, more formidable than Spoto's or Koszarski's, encompassing some seventy-odd years and nearly five hundred films. Earlier efforts by Barnet Bravermann and Seymour Stern to compose a Griffith biography never reached completion (although Schickel has relied heavily on Bravermann's material). While we already possess two invaluable first-hand accounts of Griffith's early years as a filmmaker-When the Movies Were Young by Linda Arvidson, his first wife, and Adventures with D.W. Griffith by cameraman Karl Brown-the only real predecessor to Schickel's book is Robert M. Henderson's D.W. Griffith: His Life and Work (1972),

which is about half as long.

For starters, Schickel's life of Griffith marks a clear advance over his previous biographies of Walt Disney (The Disney Version) and Douglas Fairbanks (His Picture in the Papers), interesting if limited sociological forays which manage to avoid most of the hard aesthetic questions surrounding both figures, mainly using their work and careers as 'cases' to prop up a social thesis. Considering the dimensions of Griffith, one is surely better off without any single overriding theme or emphasis, and happily Schickel has followed this wisdom; his subtitle, appropriately, is as non-committal and openended as possible. On the other hand, aesthetic judgments are a good deal more plentiful, and whether or not one agrees with them, one can certainly sympathise with Schickel's efforts to differentiate between the masterpieces, the potboilers and everything in between.

Perhaps the two most durable achievements in the book are the dissection of Griffith's racial attitudes and their immediate consequences (particularly in relation to The Birth of a Nation) and a thoroughgoing breakdown of his financial affairs-two complex, labyrinthine matters which have all but defeated most previous commentators. In both cases. Schickel has done his homework by combing through numerous publications and company records, and has come up with many intriguing period titbits. On the former subject, we learn that men in Ku Klux Klan robes on horses were dispatched in the New York area to promote The Birth of a Nation in 1915, and that the National Board of Censorship (which became the National Board of Review) refused to allow any black members of the NAACP to attend an advance screening after the organisation mounted an elaborate protest against the film. A decade later, Griffith's fall from fashion is memorably encapsulated by a quote from the New Yorker during its first year of publication: 'Mr David Wark Griffith, saintly showman . . . is indisputably the grand master of moralistic-melodramatic balderdash. He has the corner on treacle, mush and trash and automatically is out of our set.'

If any serious objections to Schickel's overall approach persist, these basically concern his and Griffith's respective relationships to Hollywood. History, we know, is invariably written by the victors, and Hollywood has succeeded in imposing many of its norms on our general thinking about film, giving some of them the (dubious) status of natural laws. But it is important to remember that Griffith was never a Hollywood director in any normal sense of that term, even if he tried to become one, belatedly, in order to continue making films. Schickel understands this, of course; but by repeatedly casting himself in the role of Hollywood apologist, he winds up explaining away the latter part of Griffith's career much too neatly for comfort. 'Hollywood had yet to conceive of itself as a cultural institution,' he notes while discussing Griffith's virtual lack of employment during the last seventeen years of his life. 'It still defined itself by the industrial ideal.' As if to imply that the Hollywood of today has moved on to higher matters.

More subtly, Schickel seems

#### BOOK REVIEW

infected by the Hollywoodderived notion that it is possible to know, with immediate and supreme confidence, precisely what's 'right' or 'wrong' about every film released. This recipe notion of aesthetics, which Schickel shares with many of his New York colleagues as a weekly reviewer, rests on the expedient myth that in a business where enormous risks are taken, one can actually determine 'scientifically', after the fact, why certain films and careers founder. Schickel is continually alerting us to when Griffith was making the 'right' or 'wrong' creative decisions, like an agent or manager with the benefit of hindsight. Quite apart from whether one agrees with him or not (his harsh treatment of Griffith's protracted use of Carol Dempster as a lead actress seems particularly merciless), the cumulative effect of this sort of balance-sheet analysis can only be cripplingly reductive.

A separate but perhaps not wholly unrelated problem concerns Schickel's ungenerous and cursory treatment of the late Seymour Stern, Griffith's official biographer for over two decades, as a 'half-mad acolyte'. Having been acquainted with Stern in the late 60s, I can attest to the depth and passionate intelligence of his insights into Griffith, which had little to do with Schickel's pro-industry biases. For sceptics who believe that Stern's heated and iconoclastic polemics invalidate his work, I would recommend his exciting study of Intolerance in the Anthology Film Archives collection The Essential Cinema-an item which is regrettably absent from Schickel's bibliography.

JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

#### Wagons Left!

SEEING IS **BELIEVING:** 

**How Hollywood Taught** Us To Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties by Peter Biskind Pluto Press/£6.95 (paper)

From one angle, this book is simple, clear and traditional. Peter Biskind shows how apparently innocent, escapist Hollywood movies of the 1950s reflected their era's politics. Not its detailed ins and outs, but the basic conflicts clustered around its major trend. Left-leaning Republicans and right-inclined Democrats united in a kind of 'corporate liberalism' which could claim that affluence had ended class war. Ideologies were obsolete, dissent was delinquency, crime required the velvet

glove of therapy, the age of understanding and adjustment was at hand. This consensus was quietly hawkish, an 'extremism of the centre' in fact. Although it could never quite overcome counterattacks from the conservatives and left-liberals whom it called 'extremists' and whom Biskind calls 'radicals', it could blunt them by reducing them to ambiguities which Biskind takes marvellous care to disentangle. His is the first really convincing sort-out of Hollywood's rights, lefts and centres, its rugged individualists and its rugged minoritarians, its consensualists and its collectivists.

He covers a wide range of movies, from Mildred Pierce to Strategic Air Command. It's important that he doesn't isolate out from one another any favourite auteurs, or established genres, or causes célèbres like On the Waterfront, or pulp cult raves. My shock horror on finding scant mention of Ruby Gentry and none of The 5000 Fingers of Dr T eventually subsided upon the reflection that at this juncture sensitive interpretation across a wide range of films is more important than briefer surveys of everything. He makes constant comparisons with other eras, and concludes by outlining the gradual breakdown of this consensus, through films like Psycho.

If the general drift is not unfamiliar, Biskind's co-ordinates are quite new, and developed with a sensitive precision which constantly wrongfoots our expectations. His thesis reads like the films in being a succession of swerves and shifting balances and unpredictable variations and distinctions. He achieves memorably lapidary wisecracks, like 'Cochise Si, Geronimo No!' amidst his patient siftings and patternspottings and suggestive summaries of tendencies. For example: 'Films made in World War II often focused on enlisted men ... The heroes of 50s war films were officers.' And he links My Darling Clementine with conservative Westerns in so far as, 'When towns were bad it wasn't because the people were bad, but because the towns were lawless, that is to say, being run by inept corporate liberals.' For whom, Biskind argues, Ford's symbol is Doc Holliday. Thus Ford would be a liberal, but not a corporate one. Which fascinatingly cuts across his love for the Cavalry and F.D.R. Which conflicts help his films to be so tensely lyrical.

Unusually among ideologydetectors, Biskind never shortchanges the trade-offs, paradoxes and complications on which movies thrive. He knows how to balance Raymond Chandler the sensitive idealist with Mickey Spillane his Mr Hyde. He balances the feminine mystique against the uneasy advocacy of feminine

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#### **BOOK REVIEWS**

feelings in males, as personified by rising stars like Montgomery Clift, James Dean, Rock Hudson and Anthony Perkins as Norman Bates.

Thus Biskind deftly steers his thesis between two extremes. On his right, auteur theory, which imputes to even hack directors internally structured world-views of their own. On his left, a socalled structuralism which assumes that some system of codes or stereotypes or formal apparatus renders critical dissent unthinkable except for born-again Marxists. Actually, CineMarxism is further skew-whiffed by its innocent acceptance of pantheons invented by Cahiers du Cinéma during its right-wing years and by Andrew Sarris, a richly durable example of the Eisenhower ethos which Biskind takes apart.

His readings will upset every auteurist applecart. They suggest how Sirk's films, far from being covertly radical, are perfectly Reagan-compatible; which Preminger films are 'Cold War Liberal'; that Hawks and Hitchcock are dved-in-the-bone conservatives (albeit not immobilist): and how Sam Fuller's soul belongs with 'General MacArthur against Ike'. One wonders again why Brand X Marxists normally get their wires crossed when assessing ideology, and fawn over hawkish right-wingers while zapping their own left-liberal allies. How badly they need Biskind's book.

While it indicates, without spelling out, its underlying theory, it takes the high ground in analysing ideology, precisely because Biskind can think from several directions at once. After long experience in radical journalism, he now edits American Film, with its rewarding openness to Hollywood's understanding of itself. He draws on sociologists like Riesman, Whyte and Daniel Bell, whose meld of 1950s spirit and professional disciplines makes them key witnesses. In one quote here, Whyte, in 1957, summarises new social frictions by inventing a fictional plot, rather in the style of The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit (1955). His outline is practically The China Syndrome (1979). So true is it that the 50s are with us always, until the middle class, as we know it, ends.

Actually Biskind goes a long way towards doing to 'structuralism' what Marx did to Hegel: standing it on its head. Where the dismal science of Althusser, Kristeva, Barthes, Heath, et al, treats film dramas as merely allegories for ideology, Biskind demonstrates that the only adequate model for the structures of ideology is conflict in dramas. Seeing Is Believing provokes disagreements galore, and very enjoyable they are too. Ironically, it came under withering fire from a Sunday newspaper reviewer who

mistook it for structuralist writing-unusually clear, witty, cogent, friendly, but structuralist nonetheless. I share his aversion, but am sorry to see anyone taken in by structuralist claims to have invented ideological deconstruction. For, notwithstanding a factdefying editorial in Screen (Winter 1972) and other polemics in a long tradition of kamikaze kulturkampf, American sociological analyses of the popular arts were sophisticatedly accurate even as the 50s began. European Marxism was lunging to link up with them, before structuralism put its sleeper-hold upon it. It's high time to break that hold, and Biskind's is the book to do it.

RAYMOND DURGNAT

#### British artefacts

THE AGE OF THE DREAM PALACE: Cinema and Society in Britain 1930-1939

**by Jeffrey Richards** Routledge & Kegan Paul/£19.95

Though Jeffrey Richards disclaims the task of writing a comprehensive history of British cinema in the 30s, this collection of interlinked essays dealing with cinemagoing, stars, censorship and some of the more interesting groups of films, is the first attempt to look in detail at a period of British film history since Alexander Walker's Hollywood, England and is thus very welcome.

There is a refreshing use of original source material. Richards obviously has a very thorough knowledge of the censorship records of the period, and by scouring contemporary social surveys such as E. W. Bakke's The Unemployed Man and H. Llewellyn Smith's New Survey of London Life and Labour he is able to get beyond easy generalisations about cinemagoing habits. More remarkably, he is familiar with a wide spectrum of hitherto disregarded films and writes about them with wit and panache.

Coming to grips with 30s British films is a problem, and general surveys, such as Roy Armes' Critical History of the British Cinema, can be misleading in concentrating on those few directors (Hitchcock and Asquith) with pretensions to being auteurs. Richards takes a more useful tack in looking at cinemagoing as a social phenomenon and at films as artefacts. They are entertainment, produced by a conveyor belt mass production process, works of collaboration between

#### **BOOK REVIEWS**

writers, directors, cameramen, etc, which often represent considered decisions made by men not actually involved in translating the script into visual images but who nevertheless retained the final say in the production.' He doesn't fulfil his promise to explore the role of the producer, and Julius Hagen, the 'Tsar of Twickenham', Norman Loudon of Sound City Shepperton, John Corfield of British National, Richard Norton of Pinewood, Walter Mycroft of Elstree are left to linger in the shadows of history. On the other hand, he does rescue a lost cycle of football pool movies and attempts a serious assessment of John Baxter's unique body of populist films.

In fact, Richards is much less dispassionate than one might suppose. Old Mother Riley is 'a veritable Brünnhilde of the back streets', while 'simpering' Elisabeth Bergner is accused of 'posturing tweeness'. They may all be artefacts, but Keep Your Seats Please is a 'tightly-plotted, fastmoving farce', Waltzes from Vienna is a 'far from negligible achievement', Nell Gwyn with its 'double entendres and bawdy banter' is 'both sexy and funny' This is all to the good. Indeed, one of the strengths of the book is its perceptive, discerning analysis of British stars-Fields, Formby, Leslie Howard, Jessie Matthews, Robert Donat-highly popular in the 30s but since consigned to critical oblivion.

Unfortunately, though, Richards seems to think that a serious contribution to film studies is acceptable now only if set within a neo-Marxist theoretical framework. This he acquires from Stuart Hall's conveniently predigested version of Gramsci. 'According to this theory, the ruling class exert their authority over the other classes by a combination of force and the winning of consent. The ruling class's view of "reality" comes to constitute the primary "reality" of the subordinate classes and the ruling class sets the limits, both mental and structural, within which the subordinate classes live.' This sort of attitude, which condemns those of us not of 'the ruling class' to a half-life of borrowed ideas, a benighted false consciousness, has been challenged by historians like Carlo Ginzburg and Edward Thompson, who have shown that the flow of ideas is by no means so unequivocally from 'high' to 'low'.

As Richards later shows, the ruling class was never quite as sure as its left-wing critics that the new medium was working in its favour, but he doggedly asserts that most films were largely supportive of the existing social structure and dominant ideology', and that despite their sometimes violently expressed

preferences for American populism, 'a largely working-class audience was being programmed to accept the concepts of propriety and decorum.' Writing for film buffs in Focus on Film, Richards happily eulogises Gracie Fields as the 'Lancashire Britannia' whom working people took to their hearts as 'our Gracie'. Here she is 'Consensus Personified', duped by the dominant ideology into persuading the masses to look on the bright side and keep smiling rather than questioning what was wrong with society. Fortunately, these silly platitudes are so transparently contradicted by the evidence Richards amasses that they hardly disfigure his intelligent, sympathetic study of popular culture, where he comes closer to a proper Gramscian appreciation of the interaction between popular and ruling class ideas than he does in his superficial theorising.

His chapters on censorship for example, witty, scholarly, original, present the British Board of Film Censors, despite the eccentricities of its examiners, as supple and sophisticated. Far from attempting to prove a ruling class conspiracy, Richards shows that the Board's attitude was political in its widest sense: rejecting films which sought to attack Soviet Russia or to celebrate British victories in India as a danger to diplomatic stability, ferociously sticking to a policy of 'no controversy' in an attempt to contain what it saw as the explosive potential of film.

In spite of Richards' often repeated assertion that films were used to promote 'consensus cooperation and national unity', the impression one gets from the evidence he presents is how worried the authorities were about the film's potential effects and the difficulty of preventing its misuse. Indeed, that insecurity of not knowing exactly what was going on in the heads of the masses as they watched the flickering images in the darkened arena was deeply disturbing to moral guardians generally. Left-wing fears that people were being ideologically polluted were echoed on the Right by fears that their cultural values were being eroded, their moral fibre weakened. It is this battle for hearts and minds, amidst the clamorous cries for entertainment, that Jeffrey Richards' incisive essays illuminate.

The book is well laid out. I can discover no factual errors, though a couple of lines are misplaced on page 277. Its price of £19.95 will unfortunately deter the general reader, but for those with a serious interest in British cinema such an enthusiastic and knowledgeable book is a godsend.

ROBERT MURPHY

#### Bonapartists

NAPOLEON: Abel Gance's Classic Film by Kevin Brownlow Jonathan Cape/£10.95

ABEL GANCE: A Politics of Spectacle by Norman King BFI/£5.95 (paper)

reconstruction of Abel Gance's Napoleon, one of the major cinematic events of the early 1980s, has now found its complement with the appearance of these two works on the director. It is pleasingly ironic that they should come from such opposite camps: Norman King is a member of the executive committee of the Society for Education in Film and Television, institutional bastion of methods and vocabularies one of whose fiercest critics has been Kevin Brownlow But the opposition, paradoxically, renders the two works complementary rather than irreconcilably hostile. They inhabit methodological worlds (or indeed 'universes of discourse') whose distance from each other can best be suggested by setting the concluding lines of Brownlow's preface ('But of course this is the classic fate of great artists. For pioneers make history, not money') against King's observation in his introductory chapter that 'the problem is in fact the effacement of the historical and political inscription of the film.'

This is more than a piquantly amusing contrast: it condenses the different aims and strategies of the two books. Brownlow's is an epic-heroic celebration of Napoleon, dithyrambic in its praise of the director and modest (which is not the same thing as self-effacing) in the author's account of his own seminal role in making the film properly available once more. King in a sense takes up where Brownlow leaves off, treating Gance's oeuvre as a text for searching political analysis rather than as a majestic monolith to be venerated along with its creator.

One theme that recurs in Brownlow's account is reincarnation, nowhere more interestingly than in the comparison between Gance and Victor Hugo: 'Dagmar Bolin, who worked as his assistant on many later productions, saw such a close similarity that she went so far as to equate it with reincarnation. "He was certainly Victor Hugo," she said. "In the last year of his life he was



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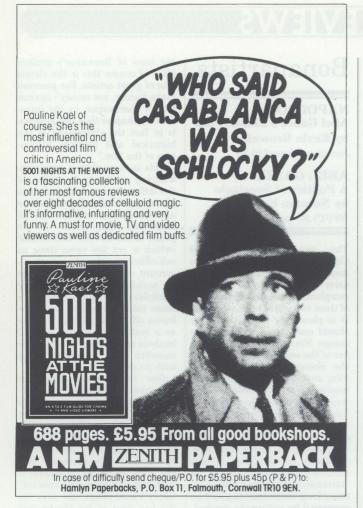
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— Geoff Andrew, Time Out

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#### **BOOK REVIEWS**

saying it, too." Hugo, we may remember, was once described as 'un fou qui se croyait Victor Hugo,' and it has been suggested that at the centre of the Hugolian ego was something very like God. Gance the demiurgic creator, plagued by circumstance and ill-luck but ultimately, inevitably triumphant, fits very clearly into this context of flamboyant Romantic individualism, examined critically by King but accepted as part of the overall picture by Brownlow.

Albert Dieudonné (an appropriate surname if ever there were one) had an obsession with Napoleon which contributed to his being cast in the role and seems to have continued unabated for the rest of his life. Tales of his being taken for the 'real' Napoleon, or at least treated as if that were who he was, abound in the narrative of the film's shooting (especially, of course, on location in Corsica). The Napoleonic identification is extended by Robert Vidalin (Camille Des-moulins in the film), describing Gance after haranguing his cast as 'like Napoleon with his troops'. The alacrity with which the cry 'Vive Abel Gance!' seems to have gone up on set, and Emile Vuillermoz's surmise that with 10,000 extras Gance 'could have invaded the Palais-Bourbon or the Elysée and been proclaimed dictator,' reinforce the identification of the film with the history it

Brownlow's untiring labours on Gance's behalf, and accounts of meetings with him over the years, yield a narrative moving in its own right (particularly the story of how the applause at the 1981 screening in New York was relayed to Gance in Paris by telephone), which touches upon the ambiguity of the film's political resonances but does not explicitly acknowledge it: 'Napoleon had never been seen by so many at one show, and the enthusiasm was almost tangible . . . . A sizeable proportion of the spectators that night had probably never seen a film with several thousand people before, had never experienced the electricity that passes between people and unites them.'

Brownlow would doubtless retort that such considerations form no part of his interest in the film or his brief in writing about it. The problem is that the spiral of mythical and historical identification traced by the film, and reproduced in the history alike of its making and of its subsequent vicissitudes, inescapably poses major political questions. Norman King confronts these squarely, pointing out how the historical context of Napoleon is also that of the cultural and political exhaustion of Third Republic France, so that the charismatic authoritarian populism which bathes all known and available versions of the film prefigures Pétainism both historically and aesthetically.

It would be possible to imagine a treatise on Gance which set out from this to indict not only his films, but also the spectator so poorly trained or irresponsible as actually to take pleasure in them. King does not do this (there is no trace of prescriptiveness in his argument), nor is he content to accept the reactionary ideology of the oeuvre as the price that has to be paid for the director's innovatory genius. Rather, he analyses and interrogates the breadth of Gance's innovations through the interplay of the epic and the melodramatic that runs through his films, both in terms of their narrative and their visual construction.

This is in one way close to Fascist populism—in the unceasingly directive manipulation of the spectators (frequently, as documents quoted by King show, written into the screenplays themselves), in the alternation between the intimacy of melodrama and the grandeur of the epic, most of all in what King calls 'the construction through spectacle of uncritical subjects, interpellated as though the political as actuality does not exist, except in aesthetic unity.' When he goes on to tell us that 'it is of the seductiveness of Napoleon that we have to take account,' that may seem like a blinding glimpse of the obvious: but too much modern criticism has shown a tendency to treat audience pleasure in films judged to be 'reactionary' with the contempt it is presumably deemed to deserve, and one of the major interests of King's study is the way in which he works with and upon the tension between politics and pleasure, and the other tensions (the reactionary versus the innovative, art cinema versus popular culture) figured by it.

Brownlow and King between them (though I doubt if either will thank me for saying so . . have contributed to making the work of Gance newly available to us. Brownlow's endeavours deserve the recognition they have already received and more; there can be few more extraordinary instances of artistic reconstruction in any medium. King has made Gance 'available' in another sense, less epoch-making but of great potential value to all students of cinema, by showing how it is possible to work with the contradictory aspects of his films rather than abandoning these to embarrassed silence or uncritical adulation. Both books are copiously illustrated (with this of all directors a sine qua non), and contain a great deal of valuable contemporary documentation and source material.

KEITH READER

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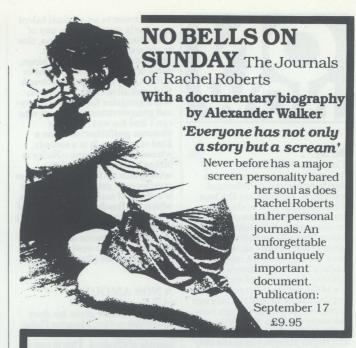
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OCAL

(Columbia-EMI-Warner) On a rainy night somewhere in Northern Ireland a Protestant policeman, who has lost the love of his Catholic wife, is shot to death in his own doorway; later, for companionship's sake, the widow Marcella unwittingly takes to bed young Cal, who has come, guiltily, to work on her husband's farm; the noose tightens, however, before Cal, one of the killers, can receive the forgiveness he lacked the courage to request. Literary, though none the worse for that, with fine performances from John Lynch and Helen Mirren, Cal is the only Anglo-Irish feature to date to have seized the Ulster nettle. The landscape is authentically sodden; everyone has a reason; there seems no point in putting proper locks on front doors, they'll be kicked in anyway Although the Provos, from whose tentacles Cal is trying to escape, are sketched as shadowy demons, the film is on the whole notable for its even-handed disinterest The Troubles mesh convincingly with Bernard MacLaverty's tragedy of two people whom fate has blown together. (Donal McCann, Ray McAnally; director, Pat O'Connor.)

#### **OLONELY HEARTS and** MAN OF FLOWERS

(Gala/Palace)The arrival in rapid succession of these two contrasting comedies points to the emergence of a distinctive new Australian talent in Paul Cox. Lonely Hearts, at once the more conventional and more fully achieved of the two, is a sort of Melbourne *Marty* about a diffident middle-aged love affair. The mood is winningly open-hearted, but sentimentality is held off by acute timing, a beady eye for detail and some hovering intimations of mortality. The darker hints are amplified in the more artificial Man of Flowers, an exercise in comédie noire. The protagonist here is another middle-aged recluse, but this time a repressed aesthete, and the contents run to Donizetti, striptease, and an (off-screen) act of murder. The tone this time is not quite so consistent, but the quality of the playing (Norman Kaye and Chris Haywood feature in both films), not to mention the commitment to genuine feelings, is equally apparent.

#### **•**MIKEY AND NICKY

(Enterprise)
Eight years late in entering
British distribution, Elaine
May's film spent half as long in
production, and emerged (with production, and emerged (with four cameramen and eight sound editors credited) bearing all the scars of its troubled and muddlesome gestation. But given that none of May's films had a trouble-free passage, and that all

bore witness to an original talent peculiarly unaffected by any of the ruling notions of cinema, this is not necessarily a bad sign. Mikey and Nicky is many things, some of them already evident in A New Leaf and The Heartbreak Kid, and all of them in extremis. It is a gangster film whose funnysad gangsterisms (a hit man who can't find his way, a rather ulcerous godfather) are also a kind of realism. It is a comedy, whose dawdling point—Nicky is Mikey's best friend, and is setting him up for a hit-becomes crueller as it gets funnier. And it is a study of male camaraderie in which the freeform raggedness of John Cassavetes and Peter Falk's playing both echoes Cassavetes own films and turns on a reversal of sympathies as neat as in the most well-made play. Brilliant dissolution.

#### A NOS AMOURS

(Artificial Eye)A director never given his dues by British critics, Maurice Pialat proves he has inherited the mantle of Chabrol. This is one of the most clear-eyed chronicles of family trauma to have emerged from France in years. Superb performances by Sandrine Bonnaire as the daughter and Pialat himself as the runaway

THE BOUNTY

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)
Mel Gibson's selfish headstrong
Christian is only intermittently likeable, and Anthony Hopkins makes Bligh a tortured man of ambition rather than the usual strutting monster. Honest scruting monster. Honest, accurate, goodlooking (with an admirably restrained Vangelis score), but strangely becalmed. (Director, Roger Donaldson.)

DREAMSCAPE (Columbia-EMI-Warner) Dennis Quaid is a psychic who enters dreams and sorts out monsters. He nearly meets his match in a child's nightmare, but survives to save the world by attending to the President's anguish. The outrageous plot is held determinedly at arm's length: unpretentious, fast, fun and a touch scary. (Eddie Albert, Max von Sydow, Kate Capshaw; director, Joe Ruben.)

#### ELECTRIC DREAMS

(Virgin/Fox) Pop-promo director Steve Barron's first feature concerns a three-way romance between a weedily 'nice' young couple and a frustrated home computer. The latter's mean streak—the only possibly interesting elementsacrificed to an overall bland sweetness, served up, predictably, in promo-length segments. (Lenny Von Dohlen, Virginia Madsen.)

#### FINDERS KEEPERS

Cross-country chase comedy from Richard Lester: start and finish are lively enough in an unambitious way, but there's a cluttered middle section aboard a train. Nice performance from Ed Lauter as a villain in a flamboyant black wig (which comes in handy for gagging captives). (Michael O'Keefe, Beverly D'Angelo, Pamela Stephenson.)

#### THE FOURTH MAN

(Mainline) Surrealism meets schlock meets Sirk. A homosexual poet (Jeroen Krabbe) is caught in a web of paranoia; Renee Soutendijk is the spider. A wonderfully overheated brew with—as Dutch director Paul Verhoeven said—a slow-moving camera to bamboozle the critics who hated his Spetters into the belief that they were watching an art movie.

#### HIGHWAY TO HELL

(Anglo-American) Romance on the run between a teenage parricide (actually innocent) and the kinky girl who falls for his image as a killer. Sails close to exploitation on sex and violence, but decidedly offbeat, beautifully acted, and a promising debut as writer-director for Mark Griffiths. (Monica Carrico, Eric Stoltz.)

#### THE HOTEL NEW **HAMPSHIRE**

(Thorn EMI Classics) John Irving's bulky comedy of growing up rich and strange in one of those oddball American families (after J. D. Salinger?) where anarchy, sentimentality and a kind of pioneer dream are held in vibrant tension. Tony Richardson plays it straight and faithful, but endless comic setpieces create their own inertia. (Jodie Foster, Beau Bridges, Nastassja Kinski.)

#### INDIANA JONES AND THE TEMPLE OF DOOM

Superb opening in the manner of 1941, otherwise this prequel to Raiders of the Lost Ark is more of the same mindless adventure. Slightly less tacky, perhaps, but saddled with uncomfortable racist attitudes and a distinctly non-Hawksian heroine. (Harrison Ford, Kate Capshaw; director, Steven Spielberg.)

#### THE LAST BATTLE

(ICA Projects) Striking first feature by Luc Besson depicting life after the holocaust. A little  $d\acute{e}j\grave{a}vu$  in its sociological predictions, but done with a nice edge of humour and stunning black and white camerawork. (Pierre Jolivet, Jean Bouise, Jean Reno.)

#### LAUGHTER HOUSE

(Palace)A 'goose drive' from Norfolk to Smithfield provides the selfeffacing basis for some pawky perceptions about the contemporary British scene in a film that affectingly updates Ealing and offers an affirmative counterpart to Richard Eyre's earlier *Ploughman's Lunch*. (Ian Holm, Penelope Wilton, Bill Owen.)

#### THE NATURAL

(Columbia-EMI-Warner) Embarrassingly overblown adaptation of Bernard Malamud's novel in which the allegory (baseball player as Arthurian knight in quest of the Holy Grail) is laid on with ham-fisted abandon. A vanity booster for Robert Redford as the wonderboy. (Robert Duvall, Glenn Close, Kim Basinger; director, Barry Levinson.)

#### REUBEN, REUBEN

(Enterprise)Thankless vehicle for Tom Conti, who plays a Celtic, 'anarchic' Dudley Moore in the guise of a drunken poet on the loose in a prim New England town. The self-pitying sponger goes to rack and ruin amid pallid, dated satire of middle-class philistinism. (Kelly McGillis, Roberts Blossom; director, Robert Ellis Miller.)

#### ROMANCING THE STONE

(Columbia-EMI-Warner) Breathless scramble through Colombia; lady novelist retrieves emerald, saves widowed sister; double-crossing baddie loses hand (and jewel) to large croc; Michael Douglas turns latter into pair of handsome boots, makes fortune, gets girl. Jolly unpretentious adventuring. (Kathleen Turner; director, Robert Zemeckis.)

#### STAR TREK III—THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK

(UIP)After demise of Mr Spock at the end of Part II the crew of the Starship 'Enterprise' are in a pickle—how to keep the adventure going? As director, Spock himself (Leonard Nimoy) pulls off elaborate, portentous resurrection, after many a Saturday-serial effect. (William Shatner, DeForest Kelley, Nichelle Nichols.)

#### STREETS OF FIRE

Walter Hill's 'rock and roll fable' turns out to be a vacuous mishmash of elements from Rumble Fish, One from the Heart and Escape from New York. The result, rather than epic or mythic, is rather like a featurelength trailer. (Michael Paré, Amy Madigan, Willem Dafoe.)

#### SUNDAY IN THE COUNTRY

(Artificial Eye) Bertrand Tavernier's impressionistic period piece about a family visit one lazy summer Sunday which provokes an elderly painter into a reappraisal of his life and art. Prettily evocative, but a bit thin. (Louis Ducreux, Sabina Azema, Michel Aumont.)

#### SUPERGIRL

(Columbia-EMI-Warner) Supergirl's home base, Argo City, looks and sounds—warningly-like a cutprice intergalactic shopping centre. No blame attaches to the special-effects team and to the star Helen Slater, but everyone else deserves to be grounded. (Faye Dunaway, Peter O'Toole; director, Jeannot Szwarc.)

#### WHERE THE GREEN ANTS DREAM

(Artificial Eye) Werner Herzog, in search of another lost cause and vanishing civilisation, comes up with a threat to Aboriginal foundation myth from Australian mining interests. Standard ecological drama, not really enlivened by gobbets of whimsy and dementia in the Herzog vein. (Bruce Spence, Wandjuk Marika.)

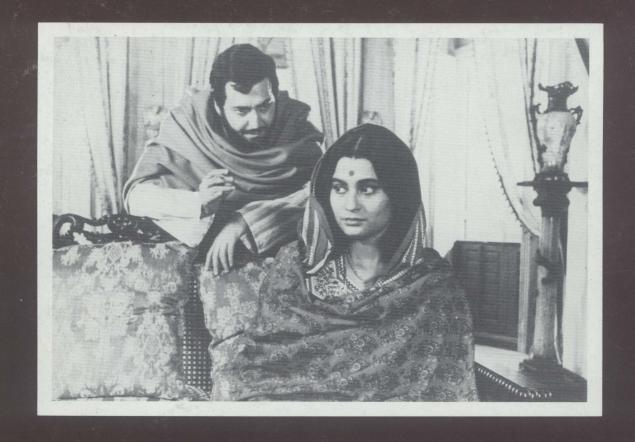
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